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Animating History of Celebes Sea Region in 19th Century: Reviving Historical Context through Animation

RR. Mega Iranti Kusumawardhani
Multimedia Nusantara University
Scientia Boulevard, Gading Serpong
Tangerang - Banten 15811 Indonesia
rr.mega@lecturer.umn.ac.id

M. Cahya Daulay
Multimedia Nusantara University
Scientia Boulevard, Gading Serpong
Tangerang - Banten 15811 Indonesia
cahya.daulay@umn.ac.id

Abstract
The use of animation to reconstruct shape and motion has been widely used in many ways, but the limitation of this medium makes animation has not been readily accepted to reconstruct history. Accuracy is what to consider the most in reconstructing history, and compared to live action medium, the power of animation medium to reconstruct history accurately is limited. Beside its limitation to present accuracy, animation can be a powerful medium to revive historical context from a situation. Animating a historical situation can give audience an opportunity to feel and being engaged with the historical context of the situation. This article presents a research in progress which objective is to revive historical context of a historical situation.

Keywords: digital animation, history, Celebes Sea region

Lapian’s History of Celebes Sea Region in 19th Century: an offer to reconsider historical perspective

In 1986 Lapian wrote his dissertation about the situation of Celebes Sea in 19th Century, and later in 2009, his dissertation is being published. As a historian, Lapian spent years in studying Celebes Sea region and Indonesian forgotten maritime culture. He collected data from various source and found out that most written data about Indonesian history came from colonials’ perspectives. This, he commented, lead to the unfairness, since history of a nation should be written based on the perspective of itself.

To explain history of Celebes Sea region in 19th century, Lapian tried to describe the relationship of Orang Laut (people of the sea), Bajak Laut (pirate of the sea) and Raja Laut (king of the sea) in shaping maritime culture in the region. When colonial occupied Indonesia in 16th century, the maritime culture ecosystem has changed. Further, Lapian did not only try to explain the situation of Celebes Sea region in 19th century based on historical data he has collected, but then offered a point of view to reconsider our historical perspective.

According to colonial record in 19th century, pirate activities in Celebes Sea region had been increasing and caused tremendous disturbance for colonial activities. As a reaction, Lapian wrote his argument to challenge the data as well as the ‘piracy’ terminology applied by the colonial. He highlighted, 19th century was the time when colonialism occupied Indonesia completely, and it has tremendous effect in the life of Indonesian people as they were suffered even worse.

It means there might be causality law applied in the act of ‘piracy’, during that time in the mentioned region. It might not be an action of what classified as ‘piracy’, but the reaction from the sufferer. Thus, he also pointed out, who classified as ‘pirate’ at that time should be reconsidered. Lapian even implied at the time and place mentioned, the war in between colonialism and who classified as ‘pirates’, deserves to be counted as “perang gerilya bahari” (maritime guerilla war). This is to highlight even in maritime culture, the war to fight colonials did exist, as well as in inland. Through his work, Lapian did not just present history, but also suggested a new point of view in understanding Indonesian forgotten maritime history; a suggestion to view Indonesian history through “fairer perspective”.

Lapian, even though he offered point of view of a person whose nation had been colonialized for
centuries, he based his dissertation from actual event, using actual data and present it the way it should be as a history. Since the work of history is to present actual data, so when it comes to present the context in terms of feel and emotion, it can be very limited. However, Lapian’s work in history allows opportunity to revive historical context of the situation. Digital animation is chosen as the medium due to its ability to animate feel and emotion of a situational event.

Animating History of Celebes Sea Region in 19th Century: Reviving historical context through animation

Lapian’s history presentation described comprehensively Celebes Sea region in 19th century, and the historical background around the situation. What hinders the audience’s engagement of a history presentation is the limitation of feel and emotion to carry the historical context. What digital animation can do in this case, is to animate and create a realm of (hi)storytelling to present the feel and emotion of the situation without sacrificing what Young stated as “the law of facts and fiction”, to create engagement. It means, the animation research in progress aims to be historically accurate at one side, and emotionally engaging at the other side.

The aim of the project is to revive a historical event in Celebes Sea Region using animation as a medium. As the research is progressing, it turns out finding certain historical event that meets the requirement was also a research. The event projected must meet some criteria; a recorded true event, took place in Celebes Sea region mentioned by Lapian, happened in 19th century, involved Indonesian and colonial representation in two different polar, and the action regarding the event must be included as piracy.

Selecting a recorded event during the time and place mentioned above obviously took some time, but then tracing the validity of an event turned out to be even more challenging. A Dutch expedition to eradicate piracy around 1862 in Talaud Island came out as one of the most representative event, but the data collected is still limited and needs to be elaborated further. From this true event, the storytelling will be constructed and emphasizing in the feel and emotion of the situation. Animation medium is used to emphasize the fictional and dramatic side of the story, while the story itself is based on true event.
Parallel with constructing the story, research project will be conducted into two phase with each of the objective becomes the main objective of each phase. The first phase is focused on visualizing the written past, and the next phase will be focused on animating the historical context. In visualizing the written past, researchers deal with accuracy of the data presented, while in animating the historical event, the most challenge is to embed animation principles to the historical context highlighted.

Since accuracy is one of what matters the most in the first phase of the research, building visual guidance becomes an initial process. The initial research for generating the visual guidance began with collecting descriptive data about historical situation and transferring it into visual. The visual transfer process is done parallel with visual research from the addition documents that collected from various sources. The outcome of all the visual research will be a set of storyboard, compilation of sketches and models as visual guidance for digital animation modeling process, and animation modeling for characters and set and props.

The second phase of the research will be initiated once the first phase of the research is in progress. There will be an overlapping process occurs to avoid disconnection of the whole research process to build historical context of the situation mentioned. The second phase of the research is a process to generate storytelling based on historical situation that will be presented in a script and animatic storyboard. As it will emphasize emotional aspect of the situation, colliding between accurate data and fictional addition will happen to emphasize context and engagement.

This research in progress complies the pre-production phase in digital animation film making process. A continue research in the production phase should be done, to execute the production of digital animation process regarding this topic.

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