VISUAL ANALYSIS OF THE CHARACTER MIYAMOTO MUSASHI

IN THE COMIC "VAGABOND" BY TAKEHIKO INOUE

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ABSTRACT

Vagabond comics, based on Musashi novels, depict the world of Japanese samurai in a realist and naturalist style, featuring protagonists like Miyamoto Musashi. Created by Takehiko Inoue, the comic blends action, drama, and seinen with detailed depictions of characters and settings. This research focuses on the character of Miyamoto Musashi in Vagabond volume 34 page 146 when Musashi is splitting water with his sword. This research uses descriptive research, data collection through non-participant observation, documentation, and literature study. This study aims to analyze the visualization of Miyamoto Musashi's character in Vagabond comic volume 34 page 146 when Miyamoto Musashi is splitting water using his sword skills. The results of the analysis show that Miyamoto Musashi on volume 34 page 146 is depicted with realist and detailed expressions and gestures ranging from hair, eyebrows, eyes, nose, beard, lips, gestures, to water movements. The research is useful to know how the visualization of characters and scenes in the Vagabond comic volume 34 page 146 can be depicted with realistic and detailed.

Keywords: Character visualization, Miyamoto Musashi, Japanese comics, samurai

INTRODUCTION

Comics were born along with popular culture which is currently loved by many people. According to Hidayah (2017: 34) comics are a reading material that is favored by various age layers ranging from children to adults. Comics are not a medium that focuses on scientific accuracy (Santos et al., 2023). However, comics contain logical explanations that may relate to science, but cannot be equated with actual scientific practice. The popularity of the comics industry is currently dominated by several countries such as America, Europe (Belgium, France, and the Netherlands), and Japan (Ahmad et al., 2005). Each country has its own characteristics in the storytelling and depiction of comics, and Japan plays an important role in the development of the industry in the world of comics.

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Known as "manga", Japanese comics are among the best-selling and most popular globally, reflecting their rich production and popularity in various parts of the world. Manga refers to Japanese comic books produced in Japan or in the Japanese language. The term includes both comics and animation as part of Japanese pop culture (Mahaseth, 2018). This comic format is read from right to left, and has a variety of genres targeted at gendered readers, including shonen (manga for boys), shojo (manga for girls), and seinen (manga for men) (Perez, 2021).

One of the Japanese comics that has a distinctive depiction is Takehiko Inoue's Vagabond comic. Vagabond comics have their own characteristics in every depiction of characters and settings that are built. The characters and settings in the story are described by Takehiko Inoue in great detail using ink. Comics that use metaphorical representations of the world can be more easily connected to the real world, so they have a deeper meaning than just a picture of an imaginative world (Wolk, 2007: 134).

Since its release in 1998, Vagabond comics have won the 2000 Kodansha Manga Award and the 2002 Tezuka Osamu Cultural Prize with sales of more than 22 million copies worldwide (Riantrisnanto, 2014). This comic is one of the most historically based fictional manga and is loved by lovers of Japanese history and culture around the world. Miyamoto Musashi is a character in many literary works, one of which is Takehiko Inoue's Vagabond comic based on Yoshikawa Eiji's novel Musashi (Mery, 2013).

Vagabond Comic volume 34 tells a lot about the character Miyamoto Musashi who is described as an adult male with masculine traits, long hair, has wounds around the face area, has a beard, wears kimono clothes, and carries two swords. In volume 34 page 146 there is an interesting scene where Miyamoto Musashi is swinging his katana with his fighting style as if splitting river water. His fighting style is often associated with a unique and innovative approach to swordsmanship known as Niten Ichi-ryu, or "the school of the strategy of two heavens as one" (Simandan, 2023).
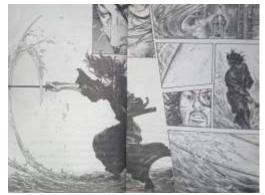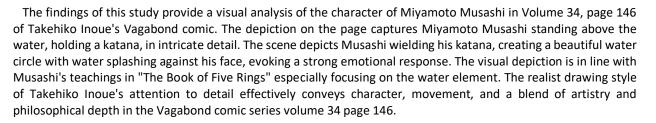

Figure 1. Miyamoto Musashi Volume 34 Page 146
Source: Inoue (2013)

The significance through this research lies in the depiction of Miyamoto Musashi in the Vagabond comic volume 34 page 146. On that page there is a scene where Miyamoto Musashi demonstrates a unique fighting style such as splitting river water with his katana. The depiction on the page has significance with the detailed and realist visualization created by Takehiko Inoue that explains the complex representation of a Japanese samurai historical figure. Using a deceptive method involving non-participant observation, documentation, and literature study, this research aims to reveal the depth of artistic expression and narrative complexity encapsulated in the scene.

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The findings of this study provide a visual analysis of the character of Miyamoto Musashi in Volume 34, page 146 of Takehiko Inoue's Vagabond comic. The depiction on the page captures Miyamoto Musashi standing above the water, holding a katana, in intricate detail. The scene depicts Musashi wielding his katana, creating a beautiful water circle with water splashing against his face, evoking a strong emotional response. The visual depiction is in line with Musashi's teachings in "The Book of Five Rings" especially focusing on the water element. The realist drawing style of Takehiko Inoue's attention to detail effectively conveys character, movement, and a blend of artistry and philosophical depth in the Vagabond comic series volume 34 page 146.

The Vagabond comic's depiction of Miyamoto Musashi can underscore the positive impact of using the comic medium to convey stories and cultural representations through historical figures. Through Takehiko Inoue's depiction, readers are not only immersed in a visually appealing narrative, but also gain insight into a historical figure such as Miyamoto Musashi and his philosophical teachings. By incorporating elements from Musashi's work "The Book of Five Rings" that focus on the symbolism of water. This comic brings philosophical concepts to a wider audience. In addition, the detailed depiction of Musashi's character and environment demonstrates the potential of comics to transcend boundaries and effectively communicate complex ideas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Wibowo's (2021) research entitled "Character Review of Dalang Pelo Animation Using Descriptive Method Analysis" discusses the various main characters of the animation such as Acil, Leri, and others. This research uses descriptive methods to understand the depiction of characters in the animation. The focus is on the physical and psychological aspects of the character, such as appearance, behavior, and the character's role and relationship in the story. Although character analysis in animation has existed, it still has gaps in the understanding of how these characters are understood by the audience and how it affects the audience. In addition, there has been no research that specifically explores how the character's role evolves over time. The results of the study show that each character in the animation "Dalang Pelo" has their own role and characteristics, even without a clear storyline. However, there are contrasting roles between the characters' roles in the story and their original roles. This shows the complexity of character portrayal in animation.

Pranoto et al's research (2019) entitled "VISUAL ANALYSIS OF THE CHARACTER "JACK THE RIPPER" IN THE IDENTITY V GAME". This research discusses the design style in Asymmetrical online games which often use icons and symbols that reflect a certain era. One of the popular characters in this game is Jack The Ripper. This research aims to analyze the visual appearance of the Jack The Ripper character in the Identity V game with a gothic concept and compare it with the original figure from the Victorian era. This research method is qualitative with a descriptive approach to explore the visual phenomenon of characters such as visual, historical, narrative aspects. Although there have been previous studies, this analysis still has a gap in understanding more about the correlation between character design and the historical era represented. The results of this research show that the character design of Jack The Ripper in Identity V is relevant to the known historical attributes. This research contributes to the understanding of how character design in games can reflect the historical era represented.

Furthermore, the research of Musnur et al (2019) entitled "ANALYSIS OF CHARACTER DISPLAY AND STORY LINE IN VULCAMAN-Z COMICS". This study aims to explore the character visualization and storyline of Udin's character who turns into Vulcaman-Z to fight monsters in the city of Koalapanda. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the methods of interview, literature study, and observation. This research still has shortcomings in

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understanding the characteristics and distinctive styles of Indonesian comics. Often, Indonesian comics tend to be influenced by outside styles, such as Japanese or American, without developing their own identity or distinctive style. So more research needs to be done to identify the characteristics of Indonesian comics and provide insight for Indonesian comic artists. This research shows that the Vulcaman-Z comic is unique in its presentation of characters and storylines. But more understanding is needed to understand the characteristics of Indonesian comics as a whole.

Although there have been similar studies that discuss character visualization through various media such as animation, games, and comics, of course there are still gaps in how to understand character depictions from various contexts. The current research study entitled "Visual Analysis of the Character Miyamoto Musashi in the Comic "Vagabond" by Takehiko Inoue" will focus and dig deeper into the visualization of the Miyamoto Musashi character scene in the Vagabond comic volume 34 page 146 when Miyamoto Musashi is splitting water with his sword.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive method in this research is a research procedure with data presentation in the form of an analysis of the visual character of Miyamoto Musashi in the Vagabond comic volume 34 page 146. The main focus of the descriptive method explains the object of research specifically including the results of the description carried out. Descriptive according to Djajasudarma (2006: 16) describes the characteristics of the data accurately according to the nature of the nature itself. So that the final result will be explained in detail and not just show the final result.

Data collection techniques are carried out by means of non-participant observation where the researcher acts as an observer but does not affect the object being studied (Sutopo, 2006: 76). Observations were made of the Vagabond comic character Miyamoto Musashi on volume 34 page 146. This research requires written data obtained through literature study by reading, analyzing, and reviewing the data needed to strengthen the data. The data collection techniques used by way of documentation by collecting data through Vagabond comic volume 34 page 146 against Miyamoto Musashi.

DISCUSSION

Comics are a means of communication or more precisely as a container for conveying stories (Eisner, 1985). Comics can also be defined as a pictorial story media that serves to convey learning messages (Waluyanto, 2005). In simple terms, comics can be said to be a form of art that communicates stories using image media combined with text, dialog, narration, effects, sound, and other information.

Vagabond comics are comics with manual creation using black ink. In its creation Takehiko Inoue uses a realist and naturalist depiction style different from Japanese comics in general. In Indonesia, Vagabond comics are translated from Japanese into Indonesian and then printed in one full book. In one Vagabond comic book consists of 7 chapters, each chapter page consists of 10 pages in black and white but in certain chapters there are special panels that have color.

Miyamoto Musashi in Takehiko Inoue's Vagabond comic is a respected Japanese samurai historical figure as well as a protagonist. Takehiko Inoue adapted the character of Miyamoto Musashi, which was redrawn based on the historical story in the novel "Musashi" by Eiji Yoshikawa. The creation of character design has come a long way, although initially it consisted of simple drawings, the development of the industry has encouraged the exploration of various design directions, including in comics (Sattayasai, 2023).

Miyamoto Musashi, portrayed by Inoue, was a philosopher and wrote a book called "The Book of Five Rings". In

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the book, there are five classes of discussion related to elements such as earth, water, fire, wind, and the book of emptiness. The following is a visual analysis of the main character Miyamoto Musashi in the Vagabond comic volume 34 page 146.
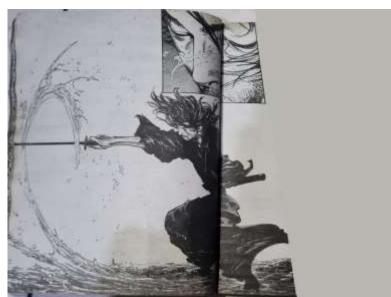

Figure 2. Visual Character of Miyamoto Musashi
Source: Inoue (2013)

On volume 34 page 146 there is a composite page that shows visuals without any text. On the page is a full panel that shows the visuals of Miyamoto Musashi's character as a whole along with a panel that shows facial expressions. Both panels serve as a point-of-view (POV) or subjective point of view, where the visual image reflects the perceptual view of a character in a scene (Cohn et al., 2023). Characters do not only function as "actors" in a work, but also as ideological representations of the creator that are carefully designed to communicate more deeply through a distinctive visual language (Purwaningsih, 2017).

The visual character of Miyamoto Musashi on the page is depicted in a realist drawing style from hair to feet with a black and white or grayscale manga coloring style. Miyamoto Musashi is drawn manually using ink with in-depth details. Miyamoto Musashi is depicted standing in a stance over a shallow pool of water. Long wet hair flowing upwards, clothes flapping in the wind, light reflections on the clothes so that there are differences in color. Expressions are depicted as flat, full faces with closed eyes. Poses and expressions are often magnified to elicit a stronger emotional response from the reader (Nairat et al., 2020). The facial area is described as firm, long thick eyebrows with a medium arch shape, sharp nose, thin beard as a sign that Musashi is an adult man, and a slight scratch on the right cheek. Miyamoto Musashi is depicted wearing a traditional hakama kimono. The left hand holds the scabbard while the right hand grasps the sword, the sword in the right hand is moved forward as if parrying so as to produce a beautiful water circle, the splashing water from the sword's flickering hits his face full of concentration.

A glimpse of the page depicted by Takehiko Inoue shows Miyamoto Musashi splitting water using his sword. If you look at Miyamoto Musashi's teachings in his book entitled "The Book of Five Rings". In the book, there is one element related to the picture, namely water. The water chapter in his book discusses a martial technique known as the basic principles of swordsmanship associated with it. This martial technique focuses on the concept that water can

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be used as an analogy to describe flow and adaptive properties in everyday life (Guenni, 2022). Thus, the visualization in Vagabond comic volume 34 page 146 relates to the teachings in his book entitled "The Book of Five Rings" regarding the water chapter. Miyamoto Musashi's character is depicted with realism and detail starting from the anatomical shape of the body, gestures, expressions, and other forms of objects such as examples of traditional kimono hakama clothes worn, swords, scabbards, and water which are depicted in detail like the original form using ink.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The conclusion of the above discussion highlights the importance of Miyamoto Musashi's character portrayal in the Vagabond comic as a distinctive representation of Japanese art and culture. Takehiko Inoue's in-depth and realistic depiction presents an inspiring historical figure with various aspects, from his physical appearance to his philosophy of life. The visual analysis of the special scene in volume 34 page 146 provides a deeper understanding of Miyamoto Musashi's teachings, especially related to the concept of water in "The Book of Five Rings". The implications of this research are an expanded understanding of the role of comics as a medium for conveying cultural and philosophical values, as well as the potential of comics to combine visual and narrative arts in a profound and inspiring way. Specific recommendations based on the findings of this study include the development of learning approaches that utilize comics as an effective educational tool, as well as the need for further research on the integration of cultural and historical values in popular artworks such as comics. Thus, Vagabond comics are not only an entertaining work of art, but also a valuable source of knowledge and inspiration for the wider community.

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