

DESIGNING THE VISUAL CHARACTER “LAKSAMANA MEGANTARA” AS A VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF INDONESIAN MARITIME CULTURE

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Abstract

Indonesia is the largest archipelagic country in the world and is often referred to as a maritime nation. However, public awareness of maritime culture remains low, particularly among children and teenagers. This design project aimed to create a character design that represents Indonesian maritime culture. The writer employed a qualitative method combined with an iconographic approach, utilizing symbolic elements derived from books and articles that discuss maritime cultural elements, history, and iconography in Indonesia. This approach was chosen to simplify the design process, especially when direct observation was not possible due to limited access to sources. The findings from the literature served as the foundation for the character development. The resulting character represents Indonesian maritime culture, inspired by the Malay ethnic group from the Riau Islands. It is expected that this character design can raise public awareness—particularly among the younger generation—of the nation's rich maritime heritage as a form of respect, preservation, and wise utilization of the sea, while also strengthening the focus on maritime culture as part of national identity.

Keywords: Character Design, Cultural Design, Maritime Culture

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is known as the world's largest archipelagic country, with more than 17,000 islands scattered across the Indian and Pacific Oceans. This geographical condition makes the sea a vital aspect of daily life, serving as a transportation route, a channel for trade, a space for cultural expression, and the main source of livelihood for many coastal communities. The abundance of Indonesian marine resources has shaped a rich maritime culture rooted in the lives of coastal societies. This culture is closely tied to local wisdom, traditions, and beliefs that are deeply embedded in national identity. Maritime-related activities include fishing, marine farming, trade, sailing, and traditional rituals that remain interconnected with the sea. Moreover, maritime culture encompasses specific knowledge and expertise in areas such as navigation, marine resource management, and creative practices in utilizing the ocean's potential (Bourdieu, 1977).

Maritime culture represents the lifestyle and social dynamics of communities that are

closely connected to the sea and its resources. This concept includes a wide range of aspects, such as social systems, economic structures, political relations, and cultural practices that emerge from human interaction with the marine environment. According to Indriyanto et al. (2019), explained that maritime culture is not only based on physical engagement with the sea but also deeply influences the formation of values, collective behavior, and cultural identities in coastal societies. As such, maritime culture is a multifaceted heritage that reflects the integration of environmental, cultural, and social dimensions.

Despite its importance, maritime culture in Indonesia has not been widely promoted or introduced, especially among the younger generation. As modern lifestyles and digital technology continue to shape daily life, preserving maritime cultural values has become increasingly challenging. This vulnerability contributes to the erosion of local wisdom and cultural identity over time. According to Ranti (2018), found that maritime awareness and education were still rare among children and teenagers. Similarly, Hapidin et al. (2022) revealed that the lack of maritime literacy in formal education was due to insufficient governmental attention in integrating maritime knowledge into learning materials and national development strategies. Without meaningful efforts to raise awareness, the continuity of maritime culture risks being disconnected from the next generation.

The urgency to preserve maritime culture continues to grow, as its values must remain recognized and appreciated—locally, by the younger generation, and globally. According to Arianto et al. (2015) emphasized that maritime cultural preservation serves not only to sustain identity but also as an effective medium to introduce, deepen understanding of, and foster appreciation for the sea and its natural resources among young people. This is especially important to strengthen their national identity as a maritime nation. Through better knowledge and engagement, it is expected that future generations will be able to understand, analyze, and communicate the cultural values embedded in Indonesian maritime heritage.

Strengthening maritime identity is a strategic effort to reinforce Indonesian characteristics as a nation rich in marine resources and cultural diversity. According to Firdaus (2017) noted that such efforts are reflected in the respectful, sustainable, and wise use of the sea, and in increasing public awareness of maritime sectors and traditions. This strategy is essential to reintroduce cultural richness to communities while encouraging more serious attention to marine and fisheries development in the broader national context.

One of the creative ways to represent maritime cultural elements visually is through character design. According to Nicolopoulou (2008: 241–251), character design is considered an effective form of representation because it can symbolically convey cultural identity and attract public attention. Additionally, Perera (2023) also found that cultural promotion through visual arts and media tends to be more effective in generating appreciation and supporting the continuity of traditional practices. However, many character designs still fail to authentically and educationally reflect the uniqueness of the cultures they aim to represent. This gap highlights the need for more thoughtful approaches in using visual characters as an educational medium—especially for the younger generation.

The Riau Islands Province, composed of thousands of islands, serves as a key maritime hub that connects diverse cultures and civilizations (Mukhlis et al., 2017). The people's close connection with the sea is reflected in local languages, oral traditions, and cultural symbols

present in daily life. By highlighting the maritime culture of the Riau Islands through engaging visual representation, this character design aims to inspire and preserve the cultural values of Indonesia. Moreover, the design intends to offer an authentic and educational representation of maritime heritage, serving as a reference in the development of innovative and sustainable cultural promotion media. The purpose of this project is to increase public interest in maritime culture by exploring the cultural identity of the Riau Islands through character design as a form of representation.

IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This study used a qualitative method by conducting a literature review to gather data from various relevant sources regarding Indonesian maritime culture. The data were symbolically derived from books and articles that discuss cultural elements, history, and maritime iconography in Indonesia. By applying this method, the author was able to gain an in-depth understanding of the cultural context without directly engaging with research subjects.

To obtain a clearer visual foundation for the character design, the author applied an iconographic and symbolic approach. This approach was used to identify and implement distinctive visual elements of Indonesian maritime culture, which served as the main reference in the character design process. The method supported the creation of an accurate visual representation. Through the combination of literature study and symbolic analysis, the author successfully designed a character that is both visually appealing and meaningful—without the need for direct observation or interviews, which made this method suitable when access to primary sources was limited (Brennen, 2021).

The character design process involved several stages to ensure that the result would not only be aesthetically engaging but also capable of conveying a narrative or cultural message. The author conducted brainstorming and mind mapping sessions, which led to the development of an original and culturally rooted character design.

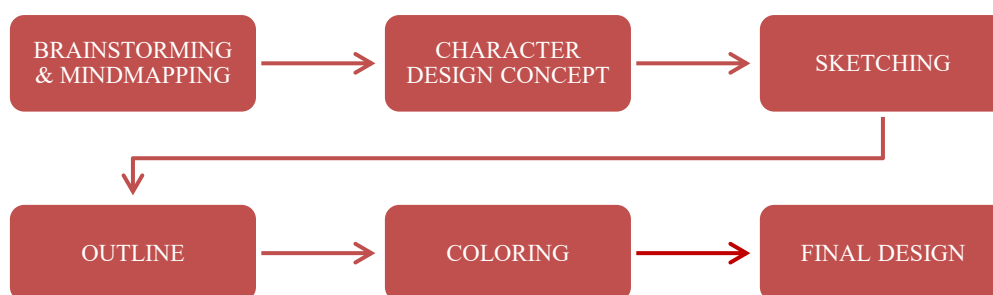


Figure 1. Character Design Development

Source: Author's Documentation

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Each design stage was carried out systematically and structurally to create a character that is authentic and aligned with the intended audience—ranging from teenagers to adults. The design also had the potential to appeal to younger children, encouraging them to explore maritime culture from an early age. This process considered universal visual preferences in order to ensure that the message could be effectively delivered to a broad audience.

The following are the results of each stage in designing *Laksamana Megantara* as a representation of Indonesian maritime culture:

1. Brainstorming & Mind Mapping

Brainstorming is a technique in which individuals or groups develop diverse and creative ideas to solve a problem. This strategy is widely used in many fields, including education (Owo et al., 2016). It helps optimize both creative processes and problem-solving by enhancing critical and divergent thinking when exploring new ideas. However, to ensure its effectiveness, neutrality and openness must be maintained throughout the process (AlMutairi, 2015).

The character design process began with brainstorming aimed at exploring creative ideas that would direct the visual concept of the design. This stage considered the needs and characteristics of the character to be created. During this process, the author also gathered several visual references related to maritime culture, including pirate-themed characters, traditional clothing, weapons used by coastal communities, and the physical characteristics of the Malay ethnic group in the Riau Islands, which served as the main inspiration for this character. Based on the collected visual references, the author proceeded with a mind mapping method to further develop creative ideas. This technique helped identify the essential components needed to bring the visual concept to life in a way that aligns with the chosen cultural theme.

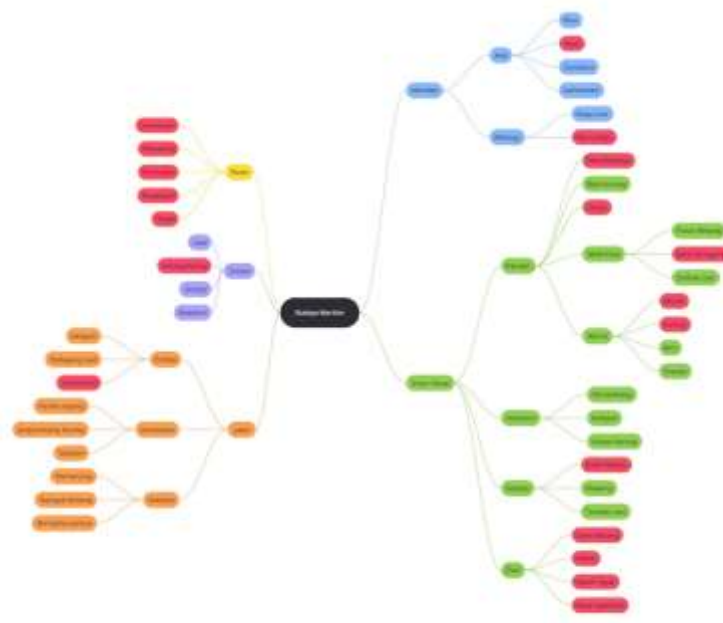


Figure 2. Mind Map for “Laksamana Megantara” Character Design

Source: Author’s Documentation

Based on the creative process carried out through brainstorming and mind mapping, the designed character was given the name *Laksamana Megantara*. The term *Laksamana* refers to the commander of a naval fleet in the history of the Malay kingdoms, while *Megantara* is derived from Sanskrit, meaning “cloud” or “sky.” In this context, *Laksamana Megantara* was conceptualized as a naval commander with a calm demeanor and broad insight.

Other elements identified through this process included visual and supporting aspects inspired by the coastal Malay ethnic group of the Riau Islands. The character was visualized with medium brown skin, sharp facial features, narrow eyes, and an athletic build—characteristics that reflect a seafaring leader who is brave and adventurous. The traditional costume used as a reference was *Teluk Belanga*, the traditional attire of the Riau Islands, completed with a *Tanjak*, a traditional male head covering.

2. Character Design Concept

The character design concept emerged after ideas were generated through the brainstorming and mind mapping stages. The collected data were then synthesized into a cohesive concept, which later served as the foundation for the character design process. The central theme of the design adopted a pirate motif, which serves as an archetype of maritime or coastal narratives. In this context, an archetype refers to recurring and universal characters, symbols, or storylines (Kim & Anderson, 1998).

The concept developed from the previous creative stages resulted in the creation of *Laksamana Megantara*, portrayed as a teenage male of Malay ethnicity, with medium brown skin, an athletic build, sharp facial features, and narrow eyes. The character was dressed in traditional attire inspired by the *Teluk Belanga* attire from the Riau Islands, complete with a *Tanjak* (traditional male head covering) and *Gonggong batik*, a batik pattern unique to the region. The batik served as a substitute for the authentic *songket* cloth that is usually worn with the *Teluk Belanga* attire. *Gonggong batik* represents the abundant natural resources found in the waters of the Riau Islands. This batik motif was chosen because *Gonggong* is a local delicacy and cultural icon of the Riau Islands, especially Tanjungpinang. *Laksamana Megantara* was also equipped with a traditional weapon from the Riau Islands known as *Badik Tumbuk Lado*—a short-bladed dagger with a distinct handle, typically measuring 27 to 29 centimeters in length and approximately 4 centimeters in width.



Figure 3. *Teluk Belanga Attire, Gonggong Batik, Badik Tumbuk Lado*
Source: Google.com

3. Sketching

Sketching was an essential stage in the design process, equally important as the previous steps. It served as the initial attempt to visualize the ideas generated during the brainstorming phase. In the Indonesian dictionary, a sketch is defined as a quick drawing or illustration used as a visual idea before proceeding to a more detailed design process. In other words, sketching greatly facilitated the development of the character design. The author began this stage digitally, using Adobe Photoshop as the primary tool to create the initial sketches.



Figure 4. Sketch of Laksamana Megantara
Source: Author's Documentation

4. Outline

This step was closely related to the previous one. During the outlining stage, the designer began to determine the character's basic shape, proportions, and structural composition. This process helped provide a clearer initial overview and made it easier to identify the essential elements that would form the overall character.



Figure 5. Outline of Laksamana Megantara

Source: Author's Documentation

In this stage, the author refined previously inconsistent and rough sketch lines, shaping more defined and detailed forms. This step played a crucial role in preparing for the next stage—coloring. In addition to reinforcing the outlines, this phase also involved adding small details that completed the visual identity of the character design.

5. Coloring

Coloring was a crucial aspect in the character design process, as it helped the designer create a likable character and convey a memorable narrative. Color plays an important role across various media—including film, animation, and visual storytelling. The right color choices contributed significantly not only to the visual appeal but also to the narrative being communicated (Alieva, 2023).

Color choices in character design can influence the viewer's emotions. In the case of *Laksamana Megantara*, the author chose dominant colors of red and yellow, which referred to the **Malay Triwarna**—a traditional color trio consisting of green, yellow, and red. In Malay traditional attire, colors are not only aesthetic but also carry deep symbolic meanings. Red and

yellow were also selected for their practical function, as they are considered high-visibility colors in marine environments, making them safer and more recognizable in the water.

The coloring process was carried out using the same software, Adobe Photoshop. The first step involved applying a base color layer before proceeding to add shading, lighting, and additional details.



Figure 6. Base Coloring of Laksamana Megantara

Source: Author's Documentation

After applying the base colors, the author continued with shading, which was a vital step to enhance the character's visual depth and make it appear more lifelike and dynamic. Shading generally included light and dark tones based on a defined light source, creating an illusion of volume and adding a more engaging and realistic impression to the design.



Figure 7. Base Coloring of Laksamana Megantara

Source: Author's Documentation

6. Final Design

In the final stage, all visual elements that had been explored, developed, and illustrated were unified into one cohesive composition to complete the character's representation. This stage underwent a series of revisions—including adjustments to sketches, proportions, poses, and facial expressions. The primary focus during this stage was to maintain consistency across all visual aspects, such as costume details, color palette, textures, and body posture. Every visual element was carefully considered to reflect the character's background, personality, role, and the cultural context embedded in the design.



Figure 8. Final Design of Laksamana Megantara Character
Source: Author's Documentation

CONCLUSION

The character design of *Laksamana Megantara* demonstrates that visual design can serve as an effective medium to represent and communicate maritime cultural values. This study affirms that combining traditional cultural elements with visual storytelling allows for the creation of characters that are not only aesthetically appealing but also culturally meaningful. It is now established that design processes involving structured brainstorming, mind mapping, iconographic research, and careful visual refinement are capable of producing characters that reflect identity, heritage, and social values. The use of symbolic colors, traditional attire, and regional weaponry in the character design reinforces the idea that cultural representation through design must be intentional and research-based. Through this design, it becomes evident that character design has the potential to raise awareness and appreciation of Indonesian maritime culture, especially among the younger generation. Visual media should continue to be explored as an educational and promotional tool to preserve and revitalize cultural identity in the modern era.

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