

CULTURE-BASED CHARACTER DESIGN AS STRUCTURED VISUAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IN CONTEMPORARY POPULAR MEDIA

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Abstract: *The global development of the comic, game, and animation industries has increased the demand for character designs that are not only visually appealing but also possess strong and communicative cultural identities. The problem identified is that local practices of culture-based character design often remain trapped in superficial aesthetic approaches, where cultural elements are used merely as visual ornaments without deep meaning. This research aims to formulate a culture-based character design strategy as a structured visual communication practice, positioning culture as a meaning system translated into visual decisions. The study employs a qualitative approach through theoretical review and in-depth interviews with three professional creators and two design educators active in the creative industry ecosystem. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to map strategic patterns emerging from character design practices. The results formulate four strategic stages: in-depth cultural research, semiotic translation through a symbol bank, inside-out character construction, and interpretative adaptation to popular media. This research concludes that characters function as communication media bridging local cultural identity with global audiences through consistent sign systems, with the main contribution being a perspective shift from aesthetic activity to cultural interpretation practice. Further research is recommended to test the effectiveness of this strategic framework on audience reception and its broader impact on the creative industry.*

Keywords: *culture-based character design; visual communication strategy; design semiotics; contemporary creative industry; inside-out character design*

Introduction

Character design stands as one of the most powerful forms of visual communication in popular culture. Within comics, games, and animation, characters function not merely as aesthetic elements but as carriers of identity, values, and cultural narratives. Characters become the

face that mediates relationships between creative works and their audiences. They serve as easily remembered markers, frequently reproduced through merchandise, fan art, and promotional icons, while rapidly building emotional connections with viewers (Saputra & Januarsa, 2025). At this point, character design can no longer be understood simply as drawing

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skills or arranging visual styles. Character design is more accurately understood as a visual communication practice that constructs meaning through sign systems.

In recent decades, young people across numerous countries have experienced intensive exposure to global popular media including comics, games, animation, and digital creator content. This exposure shapes how they understand culture, identity, and imagination (Cai et al., 2023). Various studies demonstrate that popular media can introduce traditional values and mythology through accessible visual and narrative representations. Culture can thus present itself as a living experience (S. Kim, 2012; Y. Wang, 2024). Frequently discussed examples include world-building strategies in popular games that construct fictional regions drawing inspiration from diverse cultures. Such approaches reveal how cultural elements can function as identity structures while simultaneously serving as global attractions (Gao et al., 2025; Y. Wang, 2024).

Within this context, cultural integration into characters becomes a crucial aspect. Specific characters can represent translations of cultural values through costume, music, gestures, and storytelling styles. Such approaches open possibilities that popular media functions not only as entertainment. Popular media can also serve as channels for cultural exchange or soft power and value preservation through representations that resonate with younger generations (Sutanto, 2024). In other words, exposure to popular media can provide initial entry points for understanding culture before formal study occurs (Y. Kim, 2021; Nye & Kim, 2019).

However, problems emerge when cultural integration stops at the surface level. When characters are designed solely

with aesthetic considerations, culture becomes reduced to ornaments such as motifs, accessories, or silhouettes without adequate conceptual foundation (Chand, 2016). Consequently, characters may appear visually appealing yet remain impoverished in meaningful context. Cultural identity that should function as strength instead appears as stylistic decoration. This situation aligns with critiques that many studies of cultural representation in final products have insufficiently examined how educational frameworks can guide creators in systematically translating cultural identity into design practice (Ivanytska et al., 2024).

From a Visual Communication Design perspective, the problem of superficial cultural treatment in character design extends beyond insufficient references or minimal research. This problem relates to the disconnection between culture as a sign system and design as a meaning-making practice (Yu et al., 2025). Visual Communication Design views visual communication as a meaning construction process where visuals function not merely as forms but as language. Therefore, when culture is presented through characters, what actually occurs is a translation process. Values, myths, social structures, and collective memory are processed into visual decisions ranging from color, texture, form, gesture, proportion, to how characters behave within narratives (Sattayasai et al., 2023).

This is where visual semiotics becomes relevant. Semiotics helps understand how visual elements function as signifiers pointing to signified meanings including cultural values, moral values, myths, or specific social structures. Costumes, accessories, body postures, facial expressions, even material choices such as metal, fabric, and wood, as well as

decorative patterns, can be understood as visual codes shaping cultural legibility (Wen-ting et al., 2018). Within this framework, culture-based character design demands processes of meaning interpretation and curation rather than mere appearance reproduction (Hidayat & Rosidin, 2018).

Simultaneously, character design also demands internal consistency. Effective characters unite internal aspects including personality, motivation, and values with external expressions or visual forms. The inside-out thinking approach positions psychological profiles and archetypes as foundations directing visual decisions, ensuring silhouettes and details do not stand alone but instead represent who the character truly is (van Rooij, 2019; Zaini et al., 2025).

Based on this background, this research positions culture-based character design as a visual communication strategy within contemporary popular media. This research seeks to answer the following question:

How can culture-based character design be formulated as a structured visual communication strategy so that culture does not stop at ornamentation but becomes a meaning system that can be translated into visual decisions, remaining authentic while adapting to the demands of contemporary popular media?

To address this research question, the study aims to achieve several objectives. This research aims to map culture-based character design strategies from a Visual Communication Design perspective. Furthermore, this research aims to formulate strategic stages that balance cultural authenticity, aesthetic innovation, and global legibility. Additionally, this research aims to develop design implications in the form of visual communication strategies

applicable by practitioners and educators for building culture-based characters as intellectually property relevant to the creative industry.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach, which aims to understand phenomena in depth through interpretation of meaning, context, and experiences of research subjects (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). This approach was selected because it offers flexibility in theoretical approaches, sampling techniques, and data collection strategies (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024), making it highly suitable for examining character design practices and cultural application in design within the creative industry context. The methods employed refer to qualitative data collection practices through literature review, in-depth interviews, and visual analysis. The collected data were subsequently analyzed using thematic analysis to map recurring meaning patterns and strategies within culture-based character design practices.

Data Sources

Data were collected through two primary sources. First, a literature review examining culture-based character design practices in comics and illustration works, focusing on how culture is translated into visual elements and how characters are constructed within cultural narratives (Abqari & Resmisari, 2025; Marsha et al., 2023). Second, in-depth interviews, which involve question-and-answer processes between researchers and informants to explore their experiences, understandings, and practices thoroughly (Knott et al., 2022). Interviews were

conducted with two informant groups: professional creators and design educators. Professional creators are comic and illustration practitioners with experience in modernizing Indonesian folklore and mythology while presenting works in national and international contexts. Design educators are Visual Communication Design lecturers who actively create works and engage in comic communities and the creative industry ecosystem.

This composition was selected to achieve balanced perspectives from two distinct realms. Three creators represent the industry perspective facing market demands, global legibility, and direct production practices. Meanwhile, two educators represent the cultural research perspective within Visual Communication Design, providing conceptual foundations for translating culture into design practice. Through this strategy, the study obtains both industry-facing and cultural research perspectives within Visual Communication Design, enabling synthesis of strategies that are simultaneously applicable and structured.

Interview Focus

Interviews were directed to explore creative processes and visual decisions in adapting culture. Interviews also examined challenges creators face in maintaining balance between cultural authenticity and market preferences. Furthermore, interviews aimed to understand semiotic and narrative strategies employed to keep characters communicative for contemporary audiences. Another aspect explored was pedagogical needs, specifically how to help students move beyond merely imitating external aesthetics toward building characters rooted in cultural identity.

The interview instrument was struc-

tured following four stages of the character design process: research and ideation, character development, character expression, and design elements and principles. These four stages focus on cultural, semiotic, and mythological aspects in character design (Peebles et al., 2023; Son & Son, 2024).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis through several stages. These stages included data familiarization, initial coding, forming initial themes, reviewing established themes, and finally defining and interpreting themes (Peebles et al., 2023). Within the context of this article, the resulting themes were directed toward formulating visual communication strategies. These strategies explain how culture is transformed into visual decisions that can be read, remembered, and felt by audiences.

Result

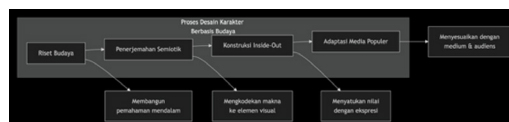


Figure 1. Four Strategic Stages of Culture-Based Character Creation

(Source: processed by the researcher)

This study focuses on formulating culture-based character design strategies as a Visual Communication Design practice applicable to popular media production. Research findings formulate culture-based character creation into four sequential and mutually constructive strategic stages. These four stages form a systematic workflow guiding designers in translating culture as a meaning system into communicative visual decisions. As

seen in Figure 1, the four stages illustrate this workflow before detailed explanation.

Cultural Research as Conceptual Foundation

Findings from literature review and interviews with creators and educators indicate that the first stage in culture-based character design is in-depth cultural research. This research serves as a conceptual foundation distinguishing characters truly rooted in cultural identity from those merely using culture as aesthetic decoration.

Creator informants emphasized that culture should not be understood as mere decorative material. Culture should instead become a concept source determining various fundamental character aspects such as roles, conflicts, and internal logic that construct the character (Sattayasai et al., 2023). Educators interviewed added that a common weakness frequently encountered among students is dependence on popular visual references without examining cultural meaning roots. Consequently, resulting designs tend to be ornamental and lose the cultural context that should be the character's main strength.

Cultural research in character design practice is not merely an activity of collecting reference images. Cultural research constitutes an effort to build deep understanding of several main aspects. The first aspect is local narratives and folklore encompassing story structure, moral values, and key symbols living within society (Muharam et al., 2023). The second aspect is mythology including understanding of mythological figures, emerging archetype patterns, power relations within myth structures, and cosmology or societal worldviews. The third aspect is socio-historical context explaining symbol

functions in past societal life, how symbol meanings shift over time, and representation sensitivity that must be maintained when presenting these cultural elements. The fourth aspect is contemporary context considering how cultural values can be positioned to remain relevant and communicative for today's audiences.

Reviewed literature supports these findings by affirming that culture-based character design requires integration of traditional values, cultural symbols, and mythological figures so character identity is truly rooted in its original culture (Wen-ting et al., 2018). Visual studies on cross-media mythological characters also affirm that reinterpretation of mythological figures into modern designs allows these characters to remain contemporarily relevant without losing original narratives (Warda-Tun-Naeem & Areej Agha, 2025). This can be achieved as long as designers understand the meaning structures underlying these figures and do not merely transfer visual forms superficially (L. Wang, 2022).

In design practice, cultural research functions as a meaning bank to be selected, filtered, and translated into visual decisions. The main strategy emerging from interviews with practitioners is that research depth determines the quality of resulting characters. The deeper the research conducted, the stronger the character's potential to build unique and authentic identity. Characters built with deep research will not become merely local-motif versions of popular global styles (Ivanytska et al., 2024; Nugraheni et al., 2021).

Cultural Translation through Visual Semiotics

The second finding of this study af-

firmly that cultural values cannot be directly transferred into visual appearance. Professional creators undertake processes of selection, abstraction, and recoding through visual semiotics approaches in their work. This process addresses the main problem in culture-based character design: how to make characters remain culturally authentic while remaining legible to audiences from different cultural backgrounds.

Research in communication semiotics affirms that symbol use in cross-cultural contexts requires understanding of visual communication principles. Visual signifiers must have logical relationships with signified meanings to enable audiences to grasp these meanings accurately (Travere, 2023). In character design practice, visual codes used to convey cultural meaning can include costumes and adornments, patterns and ornaments, color palettes, materials and textures, attributes such as weapons, tools, or sacred objects, gestures and postures, and character expressions and movement rhythms. All these visual elements work together forming sign systems that can be read and interpreted by audiences.

Visual codes such as costumes, accessories, and attributes prove effective for communicating cultural narratives and aiding character recognition across cultures, affirming that visual elements in characters function not only as aesthetic forms but also as message carriers recognizable and felt by audiences (Sattayasai et al., 2023). However, interview findings with educators reveal problems in cultural translation practice into character design. From a research perspective, educators frequently find errors in applying cultural research results to the design process. Many cultural symbols used in character design are selected solely based on aesthetic considerations, namely visual ap-

pearance considered attractive or aligned with current trends, without understanding the meanings behind these symbols. Consequently, cultural symbols that should carry specific values and identities become decorative additions losing their sign functions. This condition potentially causes misinterpretation when characters are presented to audiences understanding the original cultural context of these symbols.

Therefore, the key strategy emerging at the cultural translation stage is building a symbol bank in the character design process. A symbol bank differs from aesthetic moodboards that merely collect visual references based on style or appearance similarity. A symbol bank comprises curatorial selected visual elements because they have clear sign functions. In practice, a symbol bank maps relationships between three important aspects: visual elements as signifiers, cultural meanings as signifieds, and character narrative contexts explaining how these meanings work within the story. With this mapping, every visual decision taken has conceptual justification connecting appearance, meaning, and narrative function in an integrated manner.

At this point, the research affirms the fundamental difference between ornamentation and semiotization in character design practice. Ornamentation is the practice of adding motifs or decorations to characters without considering underlying meanings. Meanwhile, semiotization is the practice of constructing meaning through consciously and structurally selected visual elements. Within visual communication frameworks, semiotization can be understood as an encoding process of cultural messages into structured visual forms so these messages can be accurately decoded or read back by audiences (Travere, 2023).

Inside-Out Character Construction

The third finding of this study affirms that effective culture-based characters are built through an inside-out approach. This approach places internal character aspects such as personality, motivation, archetypes, and carried values as foundations that subsequently determine visual expression. Literature in character design summarizes four main components in designing characters. The first component is research and ideation as the initial foundation. The second component is inside-out thinking for constructing in-depth character profiles. The third component is exploration of expression and gesture as forms of nonverbal communication. The fourth component is harmonization of visual elements with previously formulated psychological and cultural attributes.

From interview results with creators, they emphasized that characters feeling alive are not sufficient with merely culturally patterned costumes. Living characters must possess moral logic, inner tension, clear goals, and social relationships all rooted in cultural values serving as concept sources. Educators interviewed strengthened this finding by conveying their observation results of character design practices in educational and industrial environments.

Observation and research findings show that many character design practices still begin from the outside. This approach is done by starting the process from silhouette or visual appearance first, then attaching story and cultural values afterward. The consequence of this reversed approach is that story and cultural values become unintegrated additions, resulting in characters feeling empty and lacking depth.

The inside-out strategy in cul-

ture-based character design requires understanding of at least three layers that must be built sequentially. The first layer is the value layer questioning what cultural values are to be realized through the character. These values can include courage, devotion, harmony with nature, respect for ancestors, or even criticism of power depending on the cultural narrative to be conveyed. The second layer is the archetype and psychology layer determining basic character types such as hero, guardian, trickster, priest, or liminal figures existing at world thresholds (Morsi & Hidayatullah, 2021; Wen-ting et al., 2018).

The third layer is the visualization or embodiment layer translating how these values and archetypes become character bodies through distinctive proportions, gestures, expressions, and movement rhythms. At this stage, form and body language become the most powerful and effective tools for communicating character values and personality instantly to audiences. As seen in Figure 2, shape language examples demonstrate how visual forms communicate character personality.

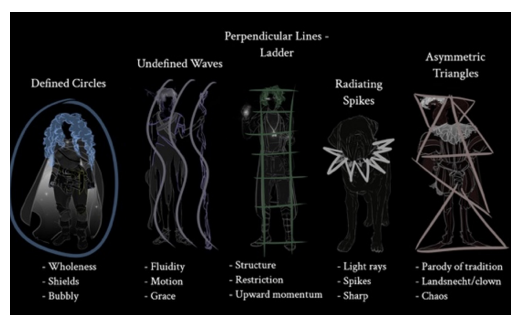


Figure 2. Examples of Shape Language in Character Design

(Source: <https://just-write-studios.itch.io/>)

Silhouettes, postures, and gestures can convey character essence such as courage, gentleness, authority, or vulnerability

even before the character speaks or shows facial expressions. Consciously designed body language enables audiences to read character values through how characters stand, move, respond to environments, or interact with other characters. Thus, visualization not only makes characters visible but also makes the values they contain feelable and experienceable by audiences.

At this stage, nonverbal communication plays a very important role. Facial expressions, gestures, and body language function as meaning delivery channels often more powerfully influential than costume ornaments. This is because these nonverbal elements show who the character is instantly to audiences without requiring verbal explanation (Tamir et al., 2004). Creator informants emphasized that gestures and expressions can also carry specific cultural codes. Ways of greeting, standing, holding objects, and showing respect in various cultural traditions are forms of nonverbal communication that cannot always be replaced by visual motifs alone (Murti et al., 2020).

Adaptation to Popular Media

The fourth finding of this study affirms that cultural authenticity does not always have to conflict with market demands in the popular media industry. Tension between cultural demands and market demands is indeed real and felt by practitioners. Creators stated that audience tastes and market demands often push them toward compromise in the character design process.

Meanwhile, educators remind that compromise made without clear meaning frameworks will actually produce shallow designs losing identity. Nevertheless, solutions emerging from creator best practices are not choosing exclusively between

culture or market. The solution found is an interpretative adaptation strategy, not merely imitation or superficial copying of popular styles.

Popular media products successfully processing cultural inspiration in their works tend to share similar approaches. Culture in these works is treated as a world-building structure constructing the entire story world, not merely decorative accessories beautifying appearance. This means culture does not appear only as motifs or ornaments adorning character surfaces. Culture becomes a system shaping environments where characters live, behaviors characters display, and aesthetic logic consistent across all work elements.

One example of this approach application can be seen in the character Yun Jin from the game Genshin Impact. This character is positioned as a cultural ambassador introducing traditional Chinese opera into the game storyline. Through Yun Jin's character, players can see the deep connection between Peking opera performance and costume and cultural identity in Chinese traditions. This demonstrates how game storytelling can become a powerful tool for cultural representation and education, while affirming that culture can be presented organically as part of character narrative and world (Ge & Chen, 2023). As seen in Figure 3,

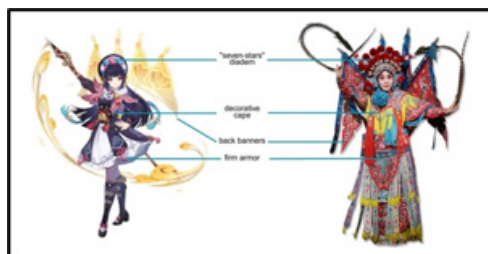


Figure 3. Visual Comparison of Yun Jin Costume and Peking Opera
(Source: processed by the researcher from pekingopera.eu)

visual comparison shows the relationship between Yun Jin's costume and traditional Peking opera.

In general character design context, this approach means that characters must suit the medium where they appear, the genre framing their story, and audience expectations of the target market. Yet simultaneously, characters must still carry cultural meaning systems consistent with the value sources forming their foundation.

Interpretative adaptation in culture-based character design practice includes several important aspects requiring attention. The first aspect is visual style adaptation such as applying modern stylization appropriate to contemporary tastes, while maintaining symbolic structures forming cultural meaning cores. The second aspect is narrative adjustment to remain relevant to contemporary issues faced by today's audiences, without erasing cultural roots serving as character value sources. The third aspect is legibility testing to ensure audiences can understand designed characters and whether main symbols used can be accurately read by target audiences. The fourth aspect is cultural sensitivity testing to ensure presented representations respect original cultural contexts and do not cause misinterpretation or violation of values held by culture-owning communities (Bourke et al., 2019).

In interview findings with creators, they mentioned that young audiences, who are the main targets of current popular media, require concise and communicative design. Characters must be quickly understandable at a glance. Therefore, symbols used must be selected for strongest visual and meaning impact, not for highest quantity. Educators added implications of these findings for design

learning development. Learning modules should be designed to train students in making design decisions based on meaning and context considerations, not based on ornament abundance or merely popular visual trends.

Discussion

This section describes the findings and analysis of the research data and explains the implications of the study. It also describes what the results of the study imply, why they matter, and perspectives for future research.

3.5 Culture-Based Character Design Strategy

Synthesis of findings from the entire research shows that culture-based character design is essentially a mediation practice. This practice bridges local culture as a meaning system with global visual systems as popular language acceptable across geographical and cultural boundaries. As seen in Figure 4, the six strategic implications formulated from research findings can be visualized as an integrated framework placing culture-based character design at the core of visual communication practice.

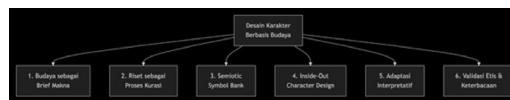


Figure 4. Six Strategic Implications of Culture-Based Character Design

(Source: processed by the researcher)

Within the Visual Communication Design context, designers no longer merely function as image makers but as communicators performing a series of complex tasks. These tasks include cultural interpretation, namely the ability to read

meanings contained in cultural sources. Furthermore, designers perform sign translation, the process of encoding these meanings into understandable visual forms. Designers also undertake message composition by building visual hierarchies guiding audiences to read characters accurately. Additionally, designers need to negotiate context considering market demands, medium used, and audience characteristics. Finally, designers need to conduct legibility evaluation to ensure cultural messages intended to be conveyed truly reach audiences.

This mediation role explains why merely aesthetic approaches in culture-based character design always fail to build strong identity. Aesthetics without meaning cannot build identity because identity requires value roots felt by audiences. Conversely, identity without communication strategy cannot build global legibility because even deep meanings will not reach audiences if not packaged with appropriate visual language. Therefore, culture-based character design strategy must be understood as a structured work system from the research stage to the popular media adaptation stage.

Design Implications

This section formulates design implications as visual communication strategies for culture-based character creation while ensuring the research problem formulation has been answered. The research problem formulation asks how culture-based character design can be formulated as a structured visual communication strategy so culture does not stop at ornamentation but becomes a meaning system that can be translated into visual decisions, remaining authentic while adapting to contemporary popular media demands.

To answer this research problem, the study has mapped culture-based character design strategies from a Visual Communication Design perspective, formulated strategic stages balancing cultural authenticity, aesthetic innovation, and global legibility, and developed design implications in the form of visual communication strategies applicable by practitioners and educators for building culture-based characters as intellectually property relevant to the creative industry. The following are six strategic implications formulated from research findings as summarized in Figure 4.

First, culture as meaning brief not motif brief. The most fundamental strategy in culture-based character design is changing work methods from the beginning of the design process. Culture should not be positioned as a list of motifs that can simply be attached to character appearance. Culture must be positioned as a meaning brief to be communicated through characters. Designers need to define from the start what core values are to be carried, what key myths are to be told, and what cultural identity messages are to be conveyed through the character (Ivanytska et al., 2024). This step moves character design from decorative activity to communication activity with clear purpose and direction.

Second, research as curation process not reference compilation. Cultural research in character design needs to be directed toward curation activities, namely selecting the most relevant elements for building character identity. Research is not merely collecting as many symbols and visual references as possible without strict selection. Good curation encourages focus on key elements, avoids visual noise that can interfere with character legibility, and makes it easier for audiences to read character identity accurately.

ly (Wen-ting et al., 2018). In practice, the research process must always include the question of why this symbol is chosen, not merely recording what symbols are used.

Third, semiotic symbol bank as coherence control tool. A symbol bank explicitly including relationships between signifiers and signifieds helps designers maintain meaning coherence across all design elements. A symbol bank also functions as an effective evaluation tool. When designs undergo changes in subsequent iterations, designers can recheck whether meanings intended to be conveyed remain consistent with visual decisions taken (Rose, 2022). This tool prevents unintended meaning shifts during character development processes.

Fourth, inside-out as strategy making identity felt not just seen. The inside-out approach ensures characters carry cultural identity at behavior and expression levels, not merely at costume and accessory levels. This is very important for popular media demanding characters feel alive and capable of building emotional connections with audiences. Strengthening culturally logical expressions and gestures also increases character narrative power because audiences can read character personality and values through body language (Tamir et al., 2004).

Fifth, interpretative adaptation to address markets without erasing meaning. Tension between market demands and cultural demands can be addressed with interpretative adaptation strategies. This strategy includes simplifying visual signs to be more concise and communicative, modernizing styles to suit contemporary tastes, and conducting legibility testing with target audiences. However, all these adjustments are made while maintaining core symbolic structures forming the foundation of character cultural meaning

(Morsi & Hidayatullah, 2021; Y. Wang, 2024). This approach enables characters to compete globally while maintaining strong and recognizable identity roots.

Sixth, ethical validation and legibility as part of design pipeline. Research efforts in culture-based character design need to include validation to ensure accurate and ethical representation. Ethical validation is done by examining visual sources used, ensuring no disrespectful appropriation of sacred elements, and checking representation sensitivity toward culture-owning communities. Legibility validation is done through limited audience testing to ensure main symbols used can be accurately read by target audiences. Both types of validation need to be integral parts of the design pipeline, not additional activities conducted after design completion.

With these six strategic implications as illustrated in Figure 4, culture-based character design can be implemented as a systematic and structured visual communication strategy. The process begins with determining cultural messages through meaning briefs, followed by selective research curation, compiling symbol banks as coherence control tools, building characters with inside-out approaches, interpretative adaptation to popular media, and ethical and legibility validation as quality assurance. This strategy directly answers the research problem formulation by affirming that culture can be translated into structured visual decisions, remaining authentic and adaptive to contemporary popular media demands. Thus, the research objectives to map culture-based character design strategies from a Visual Communication Design perspective, formulate strategic stages balancing cultural authenticity, aesthetic innovation, and global legibility, and develop applicable design implications for practitioners and

educators have been achieved.

Conclusion

This study concludes that culture-based character design constitutes a complex visual communication practice requiring structured approaches. The main findings indicate that character design effectiveness is not determined by how many cultural elements are displayed visually, but by how deeply those cultural meanings are translated into coherent sign systems. Culture within this framework is no longer understood as a collection of ornaments that can be attached to character surfaces, but rather as a meaning system directing all visual decisions from the earliest stages through to completion.

Characters built with this approach function as communication media bridging local cultural identity with global audiences. They not only display culturally patterned costumes or accessories, but also present values, moral logic, and behavioral patterns rooted in those cultural meaning systems through gestures, expressions, and accompanying narratives. Thus, characters become living cultural emissaries that can be felt, not merely seen as aesthetic objects.

The main contribution of this article lies in shifting perspectives toward culture-based character design practice. This shift directs character design from mere aesthetic activity toward cultural interpretation practice and meaning encoding in visual language readable across boundaries. The strategic framework formulated in this study answers the research problem by demonstrating that culture can be translated into structured visual decisions, remaining authentic while adaptive to contemporary popular media demands through four stages: in-depth cultural re-

search, semiotic translation, inside-out construction, and interpretative adaptation.

The strategic framework along with its design implications is expected to serve as a reference for Visual Communication Design practitioners and the creative industry in developing local cultural wealth into communicative, relevant, and competitive intellectual property in the global market. For future development, the research recommends broader testing to measure this framework's effectiveness on learning outcomes or audience reception. Testing with mixed methods approaches, for example, could help validate the application scale of this strategy across disciplines and across media platforms.

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