Where is Indonesia’s Animation?

Where is Indonesia’s animation? That is the question which I often hear from the public. I am an animation activist, sometimes hearing that question, I feel like my face is being slapped; on the other hand, it makes it more challenging to me.

Actually, local animations are distributed widely, especially in matters pertaining to television. However, the local animations produced are of short duration; about 15 seconds to 1 minute on average are used for advertising needs.

The public seeing local animation in the advertising world cannot prove the existence of Indonesian animation. They will believe Indonesian animation exists if there are many animations in TV serials or animation in full-length feature films. The truth is that local animations, especially in the TV serial category, can be counted on the fingers of our two hands.

There are many things that cause the scarcity of local TV serials. First, it is caused by local animation producers who have to compete with imported animation, which is low cost and good quality. On average, the production of animation in one episode of which the duration is 24 minutes, can cost from $5,000 up to $10,000. However, if that animation is sold, it has to compete with the cost of imported animation which is about $500 - $1000. Probably, our producers’ mindset must be changed, so as not to prioritise the selling to local TV, but to distribute internationally. Therefore, I believe that the power of animation is the content itself which can be acceptable to people all over the world without considering race, age, or gender. Beside the content of animation, I believe the power of animation is in the durable character, for instance Doraemon, which has existed for the last ten years, and I still enjoy it.

Second, our local animators lack experiences in producing animation in TV serial. On average, our animators have good capability in producing advertising animation. However, it will be different if they are given the task of producing animation for TV serials. It is not only high energy that is needed, but solid team work, and also the system of production management should be highly considered. Commonly, our animators still work with 2 or 3 persons in one team, but more than that is still a question mark. A one-man show has been used regularly in animation production, especially the advertising industry in Indonesia. However, there is an Indonesian company which produces serial animations for local consumption or outsourcing from outside Indonesia, but once again they can be counted on my ten fingers.
Third, the government lacks understanding about the advantages and superiority of animation business. On average, they only understand animation as cartoons which entertain their children. The strictness of government rules is also becoming a problem. When the Indonesian animation association needs help for purchasing a motion capture device for 3D animation, because of the strict government rules, the device can only be placed in a government building and maintained by them. Therefore, the device has gathered cobwebs because no one uses it and the building is so far away from the animation community; moreover, the device is placed in the building without the standard needs for the device (air conditioner, wide area, proper maintenance, etc).

Fourth, our animators are not used to joining an organization. Indonesian animators are allergic to associations because the paradigm of a strict association or bureaucracy is not suitable for one who has free characteristics as an artist. Besides, joining an organisation will make it easy for the government to make the policy from its founding, and financing, up to building government rules which support the animation itself.

Fifth, the small number of animation education institutions are not well managed. The government initiative in establishing an SMK (or vocational school) animation programme is very good work for now. There are more than 15 SMKs all over Indonesia. However, the challenge is in management. There are many teachers who learn by themselves or compose a curriculum without a good standard; so that, the quality of learning is not even in each SMK.

I think one realistic solution is to increase the quantity of local animation serials or full-length feature films by cooperating and learning from other country, which has experience in the animation business, for instance, Japan. We can learn from the perspective of government, animator, producer, distributor, association and so forth. It starts from the outsourcing cooperation, production, composing of animation curriculum, training of animators abroad, job training until learning in an international distribution system. If this way can be done seriously and consistently for 5 years, I hope the titles of local animation can number more than 20.