

THE CULTURAL REPRESENTATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN IDENTITY IN RAYA AND THE LAST DRAGON MOVIE 2021

Nadina Immanuela¹, Dr. Agnes Widyaningrum, SE, S.Pd, M.Pd²
English Literature Study Program, Law and Language Faculty, Stikubank University
e-mail: nadinaimmanuela@gmail.com, Agneswidyaningrum@edu.unisbank.ac.id

Abstract

The purposes of this research are: (1) To describe the Southeast Asian Culture symbols that are represented in *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021) and (2) To explain the representation of Southeast Asian Culture in *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021). The type of this research is qualitative research. The method used to collect the data are first, watching the movie to get an understanding, to check and collect the data. Second, reading the script of the story refers to the data. The last, selecting the scenes (capture the scenes) that indicate the cultural representation. Based on Peirce's triadic concept, the researcher found the sign can be used to explain what was contained in the *Raya and The Last Dragon* Movie in visual signs. *Raya and The Last Dragon* contains 7 icons 4 indexes and 14 symbols. The Research results show that the researcher concluded that *Raya and the Last Dragon* as the icon, index and symbol of Southeast Asian culture.

Keywords: Culture, Symbol, Cultural Representation

INTRODUCTION

Culture is the way of existence of its members: the gathering of thoughts and behaviour which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation. Culture is "the complicated entire which includes knowledge, perception, art, regulation, morals, custom, and another competency acquired through man as a member of society"(Tylor, 1871). Culture impacts the level of knowledge and ideas contained within human thoughts so that during everyday life culture is abstract. According to Geertz (Geertz, 1973), Culture is "a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols." Culture, on any such view, is sort of a text—something that needs to be interpreted through the research of symbols (Geertz, 1973).

Culture can be represented using symbols, language, habits, the way of life and many more. Every place has different cultures, like in the US, it is okay to open a gift in front of the giver, but it is taboo to do that in Japan. According to Hall (2005: 18-20), representation is the ability to describe or imagine. Representation is important because culture is always formed through meaning and language, in this case, language is a symbolic form or a form of representation. Some works that use culture in their representation are *Avatar: The Way of Water* by James Cameron, *Moana* by Ron Clements and John Musker, *Brave* by Brenda Chapman and Mark Andrews, and *Raya and The Last Dragon* by Carloz Lopez Estrada and Don Hall.

Raya and The Last Dragon is one of the Walt Disney movies which is popular in 2021. This movie is about *Raya and Sisu*, the last dragons of Kumandra, and their struggle to find all the

pieces of a magical gem in the hopes of restoring the nation to its previous, peaceful state. Kumandra was a wealthy land 500 years later when evil spirits known as the Druun began to ravage everything. They turned souls into stone by absorbing them. The dragons of Kumandra eventually used what power they had left to build an orb that warded off the Druun and brought everyone back to life, except the exception of the dragons who had turned to stone. All of the people are seeking the power of the orb, which finally led to the division of the populace into five distinct tribes known as Fang, Heart, Tail, Spine, and Talon. The orb was acquired by Heart Tribe, who have since protected it. 500 years later, Heart Tribe Chief Benga has been preparing his daughter Raya to protect the orb. He still has faith that all the nations would put aside their differences and return to becoming Kumandra. He decides to host a feast for all nations. Because they share a similar interest in dragons, Raya ends up becoming friends with Namaari, the daughter of the Fang Tribe's Chief Virana. Namaari offers Raya a dragon pendant, and Raya shows her where the orb is. Raya is betrayed by Namaari, and the Fang Tribe soon attempts to steal the orb. When the other tribes discover out, a fight ensues, and the orb is shattered. The Druun revives and each tribe steals pieces of the orb. Benga tells Raya to leave while he turns into stone when Raya tries to save him. Six years later, Raya has been looking for the stream's end to call Sisu, the only dragon of the species still alive and the one who is thought to have created the orb, to assist her in finding the orb's missing pieces. She succeeds to summon Sisu and finds herself amid the remnants of the desert-like Tail Tribe.

In this study, the writer intends to examine how *the Raya and The Last Dragon* movie represented Southeast Asian Cultures. This movie showed us see social conditions at a particular time and place. In addition, what makes this movie interesting is how explicitly or implicitly this movie shows the tradition, cultures, and life of Southeast Asian people featured in this movie. The researcher found some symbols that indicated the development of cultural representation as heredity from extrinsic elements through the object, character, action and self-defences. The objective of this research is to describe the Southeast Asian Culture symbols that are represented in *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021) and to explain the representation of Southeast Asian Culture in *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021).

METHODOLOGY

In this research, the researcher uses qualitative research with a structuralist approach. Structuralism, says, Genette, "is a study of the cultural construction or identification of meaning according to the relations of signs that constitute the meaning-spectrum of the culture." The approach contains two things; they are intrinsic and extrinsic elements. Both of them analyze the symbol of a culture that is represented in the *Raya and The Last Dragon* Movie. The symbol is a sign of meaning as difference; the binaries which the culture uses/enact to create its meanings; binaries which, of course, disunite and join. In the intrinsic element, the researcher only uses the setting of place to analyze this movie. Meanwhile, in the extrinsic element, the researcher uses socio-culture and society to analyze this movie. The data collection technique used were; first, watching the movie to get an understanding, to check and collect the data. Second, reading the script of the story refers to the data. The last, selecting the scenes (capture the scenes) that indicate the cultural representation.

To analyse the data, the researcher used two theories from the experts to explain the data based on the cultural representation in the movie *Raya and The Last Dragon*. The first, is using the

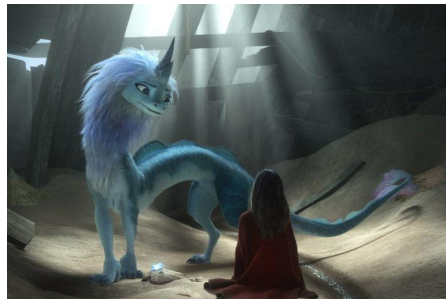
theory from Stuart Hall (1997), that is the theory of Representation. Stuart hall defines: Representation means by using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, a meaningful world, to others, besides, representation is an important part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of the culture. The other theory researcher used is Pierce's theory. This theory uses signs as an account of significance, representation, reference and meaning. He used three concepts in his theory, they are a symbol, an icon, and an index.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Representation of Southeast Asian culture in the Raya and The Last Dragon movie. Based on the movie, the researcher found the data, not in the whole of the movie, but in some relevant scenes. The researcher found some signs that were represented in the film. The data that the researcher found in the movie consists of several types of signs including icons, indexes, and symbols.

Icon

1. Icon 1 is Sisu.



Icon 1.1 Sisu. (27.25-27.32)

Icon 1 is Sisu. Sisu is regarded as a god of protection by the people of Kumandra. Sisu is a powerful water dragon. Sisu is portrayed as the god of protection for the Kumandra people to break the Druun curse.

2. Icon 2 is Heart Tribe.



Icon 1.2 Heart Tribe (92.39-92.46)

The Icon 2 is Heart Tribe. In this scene, one of the five Kumandra lands is the Heart tribe. The Heart Tribe is known as the most wealthy and peaceful tribe. The magic gemstone is protected by the heart tribe, but in the end, the magic gemstone is broken, losing out to the whole of Kumandra. The icon of the heart represents the core of life for all living creatures. When a heart is injured, the entire circulatory system suffers, finally leading to death.

3. Icon 3 is Tail Tribe.



Icon 1.3 Tail Tribe. (20.24-20.28)

Icon 3 is Tail Tribe. In this scene is a barren desert which is the icon of the Tail Tribe. The Tail tribe is known as a tribe with an arid region. The tail icon represents a tribe that lacks both fertility and prosperity, as well as a lack of balance.

4. Icon 4 is Talon Tribe.



Icon 1.4 Talon Tribe. (44.16-44.21)

Icon 4 is the Talon tribe. The Talon tribe depicts a floating house with a bamboo foundation attached to the ground under the water. The tribe icon is depicted as nails gripping the ground, providing a stable base that cannot be broken.

5. Icon 6 is Spine Tribe.



Icon 1.5 Spine Tribe. (55.23-55.30)

Icon 5 is Spine Tribe. The Spine tribe is a tribe that is described as the most powerful tribe that has a house in the middle of the forest with a very large lush tree. Here it can be concluded that the Spine tribe represents a sturdy stand that is not easily destroyed.

6. Icon 6 is Fang Tribe.



Icon 1.6 Fang Tribe. (78.47-78.50)

Icon 6 is Fang Tribe. The Fang tribe has an icon of fangs on the top of a building. It is represented by a Fang, which serves as the primary protection when an enemy attacks.

7. Icon 7 is Map.



Icon 1.7 Map. (82.07-82.12)

Icon 7 is a Map. Raya was holding the map that Namaari had given her. The flow of rivers in the five tribes that Raya would follow to seek gemstone shards is depicted on the map. The scene in icon 7 indicates that the map depicts directions and roads for navigation. The sign states that this era occurred during a time when technology had not yet been invented.

Index

1. Index 1 is the Kumandra.



Index 1.1 Kumandra. (10.09-10.12)

Index 1 is the Kumandra. The sign discussed in this film is the Index that the kingdom of Kumandra is back after Raya, Sisu and their friends fight with Druun. The researcher found that all people flock to the land of Heart. Index sign gives a message to Raya that the tribes gather at Heart to reunify as Kumandra.

2. Index 2 is Sisu and her sisters.



Index 1.2 Sisu and Her Sisters. (82.07-82.12)

The index 2 Sisu and her sisters. Sisu has four sisters: Amba, Pranee, Jagan, and Pengu. Each of them has a unique power. The four Sisu sisters ultimately sacrificed their power—the power of the dragons that turned into magical gemstones—to save Kumandra. Sisu's brother turned into a statue after losing his strength, and Sisu vanished from Kumandra. After 500 years, Sisu is found and helps Raya in restoring the magical diamonds that the Kumandra people destroyed out of selfishness. The people of Kumandra, especially the dragons guarding Kumandra, can rise once more and reunite over Kumandra once they can be reunited and break the curse of Druun.

3. Index 3 is Food



Index 1.3 Food. (09.46-09.50)

Index 3 is food. Tomyam soup, a popular Thai dish, is represented in this scene. Shrimp paste, lemon grass, bamboo shoots, chilli, and palm sugar are the main ingredients in this soup. These elements are depicted as tribes in Kumandra, implying that if they band together, there will be peace and prosperity throughout Kumandra.

4. Index 4 is the gemstone.



Index 1.4 Dragon Gems. (07.18-07-25)

Dragon Gems are gemstones created by Pengu, Pranee, Jagan, and Amba from their essence of dragon magic. The Dragon Gem can resist evil spirits and restore those who have been turned to stone. It restores life to everyone except dragons when it is first developed and utilized by Sisu against Druun. After that, the gemstone became the asset of the Heart tribe, who protected the gemstone in a secret place.

Symbol

1. Symbol 1 is Sisu.



Symbol. 1. 1 Sisu (27.25-27.32)

Symbol 1 is Sisu. The last dragon in Kumandra is named Sisu. Sisu is a water dragon. Sisu is a representation of the water god's symbol, which is a Vietnamese folklore symbol for bringing good luck (Permeability, 1996).

2. Symbol 2 is Keris.



Symbol. 1. 2 Keris Sword (59.51-59.53)

Symbol 2 is Keris. A sword-like weapon is called a keris. The keris in the Raya and The Last Dragon Movie is a symbol of Chief Benja as the leader of the Heart Tribe. The keris here is a symbol of the Indonesian state's traditional weapons. Since 2005, UNESCO has recognized the keris as a unique weapon from Indonesian culture.

3. Symbol 3 is Tuk Tuk.



Symbol. 1. 3 Tuk Tuk (21.13-21.15)

The symbol 3 is Tuk Tuk. The Tuk Tuk is a pet as well as Raya's vehicle. The name Tuk Tuk is a representation of a vehicle originating from Thailand. In Thailand Tuk Tuk is a public transportation for the community in the form of motorized tricycles.

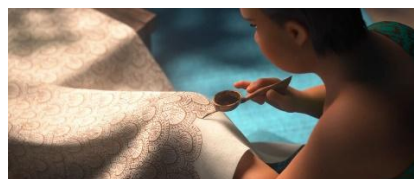
4. Symbol 4 is The Traditional Hat.



Symbol. 1. 4 Traditional Hat (92.54-92.57)

Symbol 4 is the Traditional Hat. Raya's hat represents traditional head coverings from the Philippines and Indonesia. Salakot is the name given to the traditional Filipino headgear. Caping, as it is known in Indonesia, is a type of head covering used by farmers.

5. Symbol 5 is Batik.



Symbol. 1. 5 Batik (08.19-08.21)

Symbol 5 is Batik. In this scene, it is shown that someone is making batik cloth using a canting. There are many Batik clothes lined up around it. Batik is a symbol of cultural representation from Indonesia and has been recognized by UNESCO since 2009.

6. Symbol 6 is The Fighting Style.



Symbol. 1. 6 Fighting Style (60.03-60.40)

Symbol 6 is the Fighting Style. In this scene, Raya is depicted fighting with Namaari. The fighting styles they use are symbols of representation from Indonesia and Thailand. The fighting style from Indonesia is called Pencak Silat, in Thailand, it is called Muay Thai.

7. The symbol 7 is Gadang House.



Symbol. 1. 7 Gadang House (78.45-78.48)

Symbol 7 is Gadang House. This scene depicted a building from the Fang Tribe. The building resembles the Gadang House Minangkabau from Indonesia and a temple. So, the buildings in the Fang Tribe are symbolic representations of Indonesian culture.

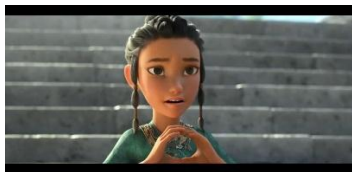
8. Symbol 8 is Raya's Costume.



Symbol. 1. 8 Raya's Costume (92.52-92.57)

Symbol 8 is the Raya's Costume. In this scene, a Raya costume is shown which is similar to a traditional costume from Cambodia. The traditional custom is known as Sampot or Sompot. In Cambodia, Sampot is usually worn in formal events or during religious ceremonies. So custom Raya is a symbol of cultural representation from Cambodia.

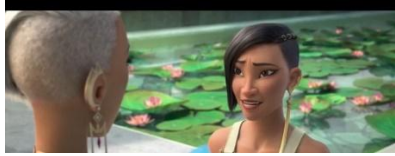
9. Symbol 9 is Kumandra's greeting.



Symbol. 1. 9 Kumandra Greeting (12.12-12.15)

Symbol 9 is Kumandra's greeting. In this scene, Raya displays Kumandra's greetings. This greeting is a symbolic representation of the traditional Thai welcome. With both hands, these greeting forms a gem shape. This greeting means "thank you" and "goodbye."

10. Symbol 10 is Namaari.



Symbol. 1. 10 Namaari (52.45-52.50)

Namaari is Raya's sworn enemy. Namaari is depicted as an intelligent, calculated, and tough warrior from the Land of Fang. Namaari means "leader" in Japanese.

11. Symbol 11 is Little Noi.



Symbol. 1. 11 Little Noi (44.48-44.59)

Little Noi is a 2-year-old toddler who has lost both of his parents. Noi is now nurtured by Ongis, a cunning con artist gang based in the Talon Trading Port. Noi's cute behaviour often gets people's attention. In Japanese, the name Noi means spring. While it means tiny in Lao.

12. Symbol 12 is Raya.



Symbol. 1. 12 Raya (21.19-21.24)

Raya is the main character in this Disney animated film. Raya is a powerful female warrior on a world-saving mission. It is well known that Raya is as intelligent as his sword. Raya means "queen" in Slavic. In Indonesian, it means "great; to celebrate; nature."

13. Symbol 13 is Sisu.



Symbol. 1. 13 Sisu (27.25-27.32)

Sisudatu, also known as Sisu, is the last dragon figure in Kumandra. Sisu is a lovely and funny dragon. To save Kumandra's world, Sisu and Raya embark on an adventure. Sisu is a Finnish

name that means "courage and toughness." In Chinese, it means uncle (in teacher-master form), disciples refer to teachers other than their own master as "uncle."

14. Symbol 14 is Talon.



Symbol. 1. 14 Talon Tribe (44.16-44.21)

Talon is a French word that means "large claw of a bird of prey." Although the meaning is rather menacing, this name is utilized as the name of one of the tribes in *Raya and The Last Dragon* Movie, the Talon tribe. The Talon tribe is represented as a dragon claw ready to threaten and protect Kumandra. In Filipino, it means "waterfall".

CONCLUSION

After analysis, this chapter concludes on what Southeast Asian culture symbols are represented in the *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021) and how Southeast Asian cultures are represented in the *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021).

Based on Peirce's triadic concept, the researcher found the sign can be used to explain what was contained in the *Raya and The Last Dragon* Movie in visual signs. *Raya and The Last Dragon* contains 7 icons, 4 indexes and 14 symbols. At the end of the story, the five regions of Kumandra are united. The core of this film is about trust in each other and togetherness. The researcher also concludes that *Raya and the Last Dragon* movie displays several icons and symbols from diverse cultures from Southeast Asia which are more inclined toward Indonesian culture, for example, some of the signs found are Pencak Silat, Keris, Batik, Rumah Gadang and Caping. In addition, the five former Kumandra areas in *Raya and The Last Dragon* are represented as important areas that combined various signs of cultural absorption in several Southeast Asian countries, consisting of the food, and the layout of the building. In all, the researcher concluded that *Raya and the Last Dragon* as the icon of Southeast Asian culture.

REFERENCES

- Abandhika, F. (2019). The Representation of Japanese Cultures in Holywood Movie Emperor 2012. *The Representation of Japanese Cultures in Holywood Movie Emperor 2012, April*, 33–35. <https://repository.uinjkt.ac.id/dspace/bitstream/123456789/49348/1/SI19063.pdf>
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures*.
- NUGROHO, W. B. (2020). The Brief Explanation of Representation according to Stuart Hal. *Paper Knowledge. Toward a Media History of Documents*, 3.
- Nur, D. R. (2006). AN ANALYSIS OF INTRINSIC ELEMENTS ON JAMES JOYCE SHORT STORY. *دمشق جامعة منشورات*, 1999(December), 1–6.
- Permeability, R. (1996). *Southeast Asian Cultural Representation in Disney's Raya and The Last Dragon. 1*.
- Puspitasari, D. G., Sabana, S., & Ahmad, H. A. (2016). The Cultural Identity of Nusantara in a

Movie Entitled Sang Pencerah by Hanung Bramantyo. *Harmonia: Journal of Arts Research and Education*, 16(1), 57. <https://doi.org/10.15294/harmonia.v16i1.6768>

Tylor, E. B. (1871). *PRIMITIVE CULTURE*.

Winatian, A., Nafisah, N., & Novianti, N. (2019). *The Representation of Chinese Characters in Kevin Kwan's Crazy Rich Asians (2013)* Antonio Winatian, Nia Nafisah*, Nita Novianti*. <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwi0gZu1g-fuAhVc63MBHcqiCY0QFjAAegQIAhAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fejournal.upi.edu%2Findex.php%2Fpsg%2Farticle%2Fdownload%2F21271%2Fpdf&usg=AOvVaw0wxr-gT9SAwtp3eBWng19m>