

# Board Games As A New Media To Local Geniuses Narratives Case Study: Board Game Project Based On Astrological System Of *Kolenjer*

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**Abstract** Many critics and questions frequently asks in comics (or any popular cultures') events about where does Indonesian legends, myths and other local geniuses go in this modern era's generations. There also a strong tendency from some critics, who blamed foreign popular cultures characters popularity for young generations' unawareness about our local narrations. The actual cause is because the new generations feels uninterested with how these local narratives told in old fashioned ways. Meanwhile, the old generations thinks that the right way to reintroduce the narratives is follow the old paths which, they also didn't notice why it should be done in that way. For years, our Visual Communication Program in School of Creative Industry of Telkom University develops an ethno-identity studies method to reintroduce our local narrations in a new media, such as board game. Board game itself is more traditional than electronics devices based games, which still popular without leaving the social aspects such as gathering peoples and build in group feelings among the players. With using qualitative research methods like literacy studies, interviews and also being active participants as board game players and tutor, this research aims to develop a formulation to reinterpret ancient or traditional local narrations into a more modern form such as board game. For the pilot projects the researchers try to reintroduce 'Kolenjer', a traditional Sundanese Baduy astrological artifact by adapting it into enjoyable board game without violating the basic values from the artifact itself.

**Keywords** Kolenjer, Board Game, Ethno-identity, Local Genius, Sundanese Baduy people

## 1. Introduction

Games are an integral part of all known human cultures and disciplines, such as history, military simulations, economics, ethnographic and others. Games itself is also the most popular media which grew up fast in the past of this two decades, compared with other media like movies. In gaming industries, there are two kinds of game such as electronic games [consoles, computer gaming and applications] and board games or table top games.

Board games itself refers to a game which played and performed in a table top, that involves pieces, and other assets, that placed on a pre-marked surfaces called board, with a set of rules that rules that accommodated by the players. Most of the board games genres based on strategies, role playing and usually represents battles of the armies (like in playing cards or chess) or rivalry between two polar or more. The goal of board games always defeating an op-

ponent or more, the other goals that could mention are, taking the 1st place in a race or collects more than other player, clear a mission or a quest or accrues points. There are many variations of board games such as Chess, Mastermind, Monopoly, Cluedo, etc. Today, some of popular board games has their counterparts in digital form such as Monopoly, due to its popularity, we could download many variations of Monopoly games in our Google Play store (for android users).

As a popular culture that love and affect generations, games usually blamed with the circumstances, where young generations (due the game developers targeting young people as their target audiences) are not aware to traditional values or uninterested with their ancestor's artifact anymore.

This paper try to criticized those statements, because some of popular games, especially board games had a quite long history that brought moral values from the past based on their original function, as an instrument to learning by

playing. For example, origin of the snakes and ladders game. This popular games originally created not only for children who learned counting but also taught moral lessons based on Karma, a moral values which came from Hinduism. By that example, this paper not only give descriptions about the game developing from traditional values into modern form, but also gives descriptions about researcher's latest project, a board game which adopts local genius' value from Kolenjer, an artifact which used by Sundanese Baduy people as an astrological instrument. This paper still limited to the discussion of the exploration and experiment of gameplay design as well as its visualization.

## 2. Main Body

### Methods

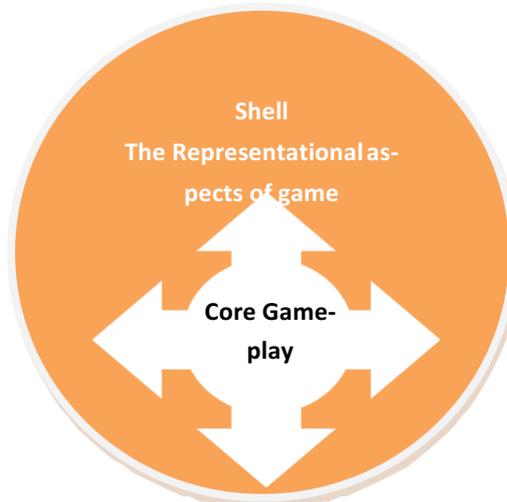
This paper is based on qualitative research, which is suitable to study and observe art, culture and sub-culture, as well as the game studies since the subjects of game studies are the focus/main parts of the discussions. The objects of the research are traditional artifacts and board game as the new media to reintroduce the traditional moral values within. Therefore, for searching the same models of the adaptation, this research use document analysis approaches, which study the history of two ancient games that adapt in the west, the games are Chaturanga and Vaikuntapaali. This research also observes with game studies approaches in how the ancient or traditional games had deconstructed from its origins by shifting the visualizations and the gameplay into profane area.

In a qualitative research also exists the interpretation phase on the collected data and analysis results, which is required in the process of Kolenjer's adaptation. This definitely has a relation to the research purposes that will make the Kolenjer adaptation in board game form.

This research consists several steps: (1) Data collecting, all about games and Baduy culture, (2) Data analysis by comparing adaptation models, (3) Interpretation and Reinterpretation by still referring to Baduy values and considering modern cultural context, and also includes explorations, (4) Recreation that includes the gameplay design and visualization.

### Theoretical Backgrounds

Game studies, uses for the analysis knife since they describes games as multidisciplinary object, that focus on games playing and related phenomenon, which has several disciplines approaches, such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, sciences and also art studies.



**Figure 1.** Scheme that shows relationship between the game, the players and the context. Adopted from Hjorth & Chan (2009).

Larrisa Hjorth and Dean Chan, give a point of view about the study of gaming cultures. The focuses of their study examines about the co-evolution of game industries, cultures and the communities within Asia-Pacific Region. The games industry has matured the sub-cultural activities, which now becomes the part of global popular cultures.

Cultures in gaming studies, understandable as a system of meaning, which focus and related to actions and symbols, in order to tie the concept of communications. Game studies splits game into [1] core or game as game play itself and [2] shell, that game as a representation of sign system and behavior (Hjorth & Chan, 2009).

The theory of adaptations used here, since the research's focus is the adaptation of traditional artifact in to modern game. Hutcheon states that adaptation is to redecorate with variations without imitating or plagiarism. Adaptation are means to organize, to alter, to make things fit or suitable. This has to do with elements involved in the process such as the perpetrator, the target, the way, spatial-temporal context including the media (Hutcheon, 2006). The Kolenjer adaptation in this research somehow is a media shifting, from sacred traditional media (astrological instrument) in to worldly modern media (games). In popular cultural context, media adaptation proven more successful and dominant due it's capability to reach most people. Here reinterpretation and recreation take place to serve two purposes: salvation of the original text as well as to enease the acceptance of the intended context. Therefore, board game is the media chosen for adaptation due the characteristic of

popular media.

*Kolenjer*

*Kolenjer* is a traditional artifact made from thin wood that used by Sundanese Baduy people. We could find some holes, lines carved in the artifact as markings (see figure 2). The markings on the artifact referred to calculations and dates. The calculations in *Kolenjer* usually used to predict which date or time will bring good luck or misfortune for people who wants to do something important, such as farming, traveling or do the wedding day. *Kolenjer* is related to the ancient Sundanese astrology, which still believed by some Baduy people. *Kolenjer* also has its formula to predict whether good or bad luck. It said that few people with shamanic skills or the chosen people could use and practice the counting formula. It difficult to some researches who were studying this kind of artifact to found the man or woman whom could do the calculations, especially for Baduy people.



**Figure 2.** *Kolenjer* artifacts collection of Sri Baduga Museum, Bandung Source: courtesy of Babeth Brouwer

The artifact used in the farming society. For information, the farming societies in Indonesia, came with the calculations to set the timing for rice planting or harvesting, plowing the rice field, or for selling the crops to the market. Since the Baduy people embraces Sunda Wiwitan, an ancient religion in West Java, they also have faith in what good or bad in their circumstance within daily life. In order to prevent calamity or disaster, they use the *Kolenjer* calculations to predict when good or bad luck happen to people base on their marked on birthday and birthplace. This system is similar to the Book of Primbon, which one of parts Javanese people instruments of belief from Kejawen.

The Baduy people belief that their life purposes are to prospering the world through *tapa* (do and act) and *pikukuh* (not interfering the way of nature). By examine the system and the purpose, we can understand that the main idea beneath the *Kolenjer* instrument is entirely related to Baduy people system of belief, about ability to submission and surrender to the will of The Almighty that rules and controls human and natural life, but still committed to their daily duties and diligently endeavored (Sucipto & Limbeng, 2007).

These are the local wisdom of Baduy society which is embedded within the *Kolenjer*. One of this research’s objectives is that they must be preserved and must be assured will still exist within the board game adaptation.

**Result and Discussion**

These following paragraphs are the discussion of the second and the third step of our research, which are descriptions and evaluations about how the ancient artifact that used to be played in order to learn about moral’s codes and also a parts of beliefs’ instruments were transforms into a more modern and profane forms.

**Adaptations Examples/Models**

**Table 1.** Comparison of Ancient Games’ Adaptations

Game Origins	Adaptations
<p><b>Artifacts</b></p>  <p><b>Chaturanga</b> Ancient Indian strategy games that believed invented in 6<sup>th</sup> century, This kind of game was told as the origin of modern Chess. Chaturanga taught us about strategies and formations that also mentions in Indian epic’s Mahabharata as the parts of Hinduism’s values and beliefs</p>	<p><b>Modern Look</b> <b>Digital Approaches</b></p> <p><b>Chess</b> The most popular board game for centuries, brought to Europe from Islamic world and Ancient Persia long before that. Simplifications made this game only played by two players as a black and white sides. The game purpose is still the same, win the strategy but without learn any values.</p>

Table 1, cont.



**Vaikuntapaali**

Another ancient Indian games that played in 16<sup>th</sup> century, also known as *Leela*, the instruments to teach the morals and spirituals life to young generations. The Ladders represent good karma as the results of morality and the snakes represent bad karma as the results of bad behavior



**Snakes and Ladders**

Snakes and ladders had the moral and karma lessons removed when it introduced in the Europe. In some versions, the snakes are replaced by chutes. The explanation of this is just because snakes are considered to be menacing and vicious to the children

Source: Bell (1983), Murray (1913) and TeamAnalysis

**Kolenjer Adaptation Project**

Based on the Kolenjer’s calculation systems, this project try to do the adaptation to new media and a new modern format by removing the spiritual aspects so, it will be fine to other people for learn the artifact without crossing the sacred border. The Kolenjer artifact here still used as an instrument to count and calculates in order to predict good or bad luck as reward and punishment elements in a board game.

The main idea of the board game itself is the players must compete each other to achieve the game’s goal which the players must decide his/her path of life by measures his/her faith using a game tool that based from Kolenjer. The genre of the game could be, race games, build and collects games, meta-economics games or survival games. Of course, the big idea of the whole game’s creation is to reintroduce Kolenjer’s functions, the instrument to predict people’s lucks (see figure 3).

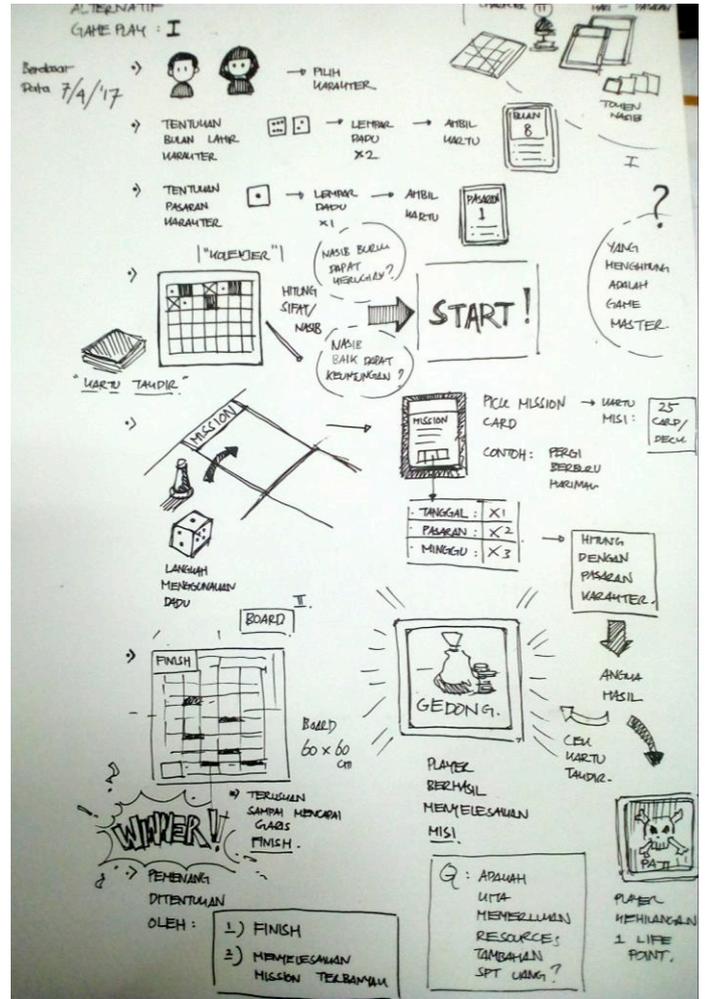


Figure 3. Early sketches for game play design  
Source: Team Analysis

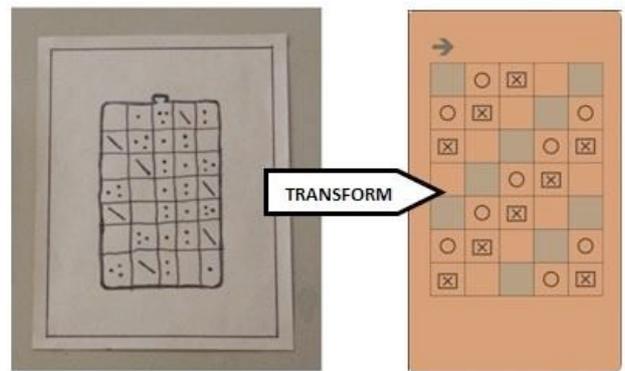
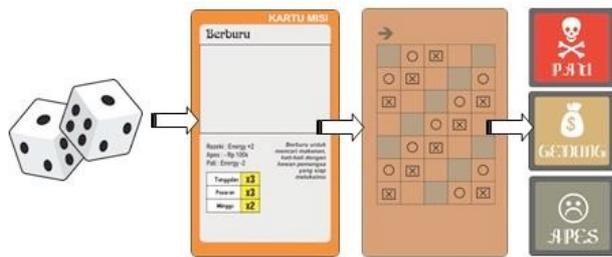


Figure 4. Kolenjer Adaptation for game  
Source: Babeth Brouwer and Team Analysis

Here is the game adaptation for Kolenjer (see figure 4). The adaptation do not change the Kolenjer’s entire form and function, but only the symbols. Because of this

instrument sacred to use, the game decided to change the symbols in order to take the instruments as the part of the game in profane area.



**Figure 5.** Game play flow based on Kolenjer functions  
Source: Team Analysis

The game play is counting on to the instrument, because of the function to counts and predicts, which called ‘naptu’ or in translations is refers to ‘time to’. There are basic functions from Kolenjer: 1] Naptu Tanggal, time to count dates; 2] Naptu Poe, time to count days; and 3] Naptu Wanci, time to count and predict lucks. Those functions is the core of the game play of this game. To play the game, the player must roll dice two times in order to give the player date and days of birth. The date and birth number will add and count when a player take a mission or order, the player could refuse the mission but cannot avoid the order. The mission and order will represents in cards. Each mission or order cards will have numbers of date that will count with player’s date and days of birth. The total numbers will count to the Kolenjer alike instruments to get player’s luck. To make the game play more fun, same mission cards will have different numbers. The luck tokens would affect players to finish the game. The gameplay system can be seen in the figure 4.

Then, the players can compete each other in pursuing their mission’s targets. In the end, the players have to be able to accept the result or the conclusion, including defeat and failure, but in the other hand still maintain good hope and positive attitude.

Clearly, some Baduy people’s local wisdom still reflected here such as tapa (do and act) and pikukuh (not interfere with the nature’s way). The alterations made are including symbols, diagrams and other visual features, and definitely the rules and game play. Cards, tokens and dice also being added here.

But the profound alterations done in this game adaptation is that Kolenjer doesn’t calculate someone’s luck

in the real life anymore, but rather limited within the game context only, and also made more suitable with modern and youth’s spirit by adding competitive and fun elements. No taboos due its altered function not as sacred instruments like before, and no implication in the real life.

### 3. Conclusions

It has been explained above how the adaptation theory applied on board game design. This shows that how an ancient or traditional artifact like Kolenjer can be brought and recycled into a modern game, added with entertaining, fun and challenging characteristic, without excluding the moral values which are parts of Sundanese Baduy society’s local wisdom, such as submissive to The Almighty, in harmony with the way of nature and commitment to their duties.

Adaptation is a strategy which is necessary in order to sustain and preserve the moral values as our cultural legacy of Indonesia and bring them to the modern society without any difficulties for young generation to accept, and that is by recreating it. Since the research is still in preliminary state, the exploration stage to be precise, then this paper cannot discuss furthermore. In the next occasion, Authors will discuss the final visualization of the game adaptation, how is the realization and the marketing strategy.

### 4. Acknowledgment

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