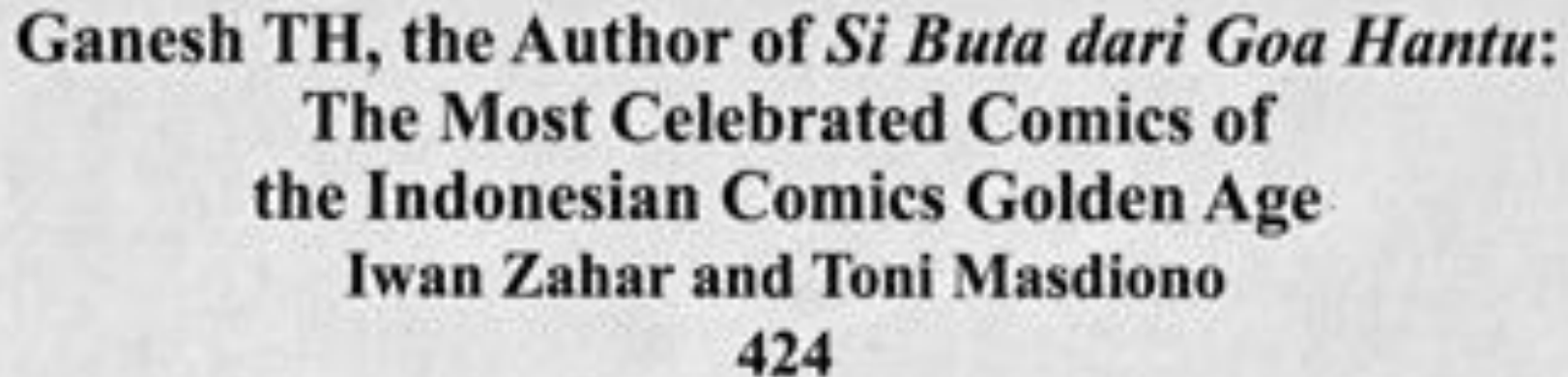


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Ganesh TH, the Author of *Si Buta dari Goa Hantu*: The Most Celebrated Comics of the Indonesian Comics Golden Age

Iwan Zahar and Toni Masdiono

Indonesian comic or “cergam” lovers will always remember Ganesh TH, the author of *Si Buta dari Goa Hantu* (The Blind Warrior from the Ghost Cave). During Ganesh’s time, there was not much public entertainment in Indonesia, especially visual art, just black and white television and movies. For teens and even adults, comics were the favorite reading material during that time, which became Indonesia’s golden age of comics. Ganesh TH alone sold a record 100,000 copies of his comics per issue (Ganesh TH, 2011).

Ganesh TH was born June 10, 1935 in the Gandu village in Tangerang. His father was Thirta Yahya Santosa and mother Sofiah Linawati; he was the fourth of five children. After completing high school, he continued his studies at ASRI (Indonesian Institute of the Arts) Yogyakarta, but had to drop out because of financial problems. Ganesh Th then became the assistant to the famous painter Lee Man Fong. At first, he was only a brush washer and assistant to Lee Man Fong, President Soekarno’s favorite artist, but he then learned painting techniques. After that training, he worked at the TATI Advertising Bureau as a film poster maker and advertisement letterer of billboards (Gienardy, 2017).

Ganesh was also active in RRI Jakarta’s “Tunas Mekar” arts association; at the same time, he posted caricatures in various print media. Ganesh also had time to work as a textile designer for the largest textile factory in Kobe, Japan, through its representative Jakarta Trading Company in Jakarta. Ganesh created in a variety of genres: horror, romantic, detective, and action dramas. Among them were: *Api di Hutan Rimba* (Fire in the Jungle), *Mutiara dari Tamusa* (Pearl of the Dead), *Di Bawah Naungan Flamboyan* (Under the Flamboyant Shade), and comedy comics such as *Mang Kiwil*, *Si Letoy*, and *Kalijodo*, all published before 1965 (Ganesh TH, 2011).

As with all other Indonesia comic artists of that era, Ganesh was influenced by many movies he watched. After watching a cowboy movie, he came up with the idea to create a hero that was launched with martial arts stories. The Japanese movie, “Zatoichi” (The Blind Swordman, 1962) also had an impact on him, and he mixed traits from these two movies, and in 1967, created his *Si Buta dari Gua Hantu* (The Blind Warrior from The Ghost Cave). In addition to Si Buta’s story, Ganesh also created *Samrilo Serial Quadrilogy*, *Si Jampang*, *Reo Manusia Srigala*, etc. Many of his comics were adapted to the big screen and became legend. Ganesh died Dec. 10, 1993





(Gienardy, 2017).

Si Buta dari Goa Hantu's stories were set in the archipelago (present Indonesia) during the colonial period, Dutch East Indies. The main story tells the tragic life of Barda Mandrawata, a martial arts hero from the Elang Putih (White Eagle). His life was devastated after his fiancée, Marni Dewianti, his father, Paksi Sakti Indrawatara, and his siblings died mysteriously. All of his family and close friends were killed by a blind warrior, nicknamed the "Angel's Eye." Barda's fought "Angel's Eyes" but lost his own eyesight during the fight. He then accidentally finds a hidden haunted cave and successfully learns rare magic there. This kind of adventure was also influenced by a legendary older local comic, titled *Wiro Anak Indonesia* (Wiro an Indonesian Kid), created by Kwik Ing Hoo about 1950. In Wiro's story, also set in the archipelago, he went from one island to another with his companion a monkey.

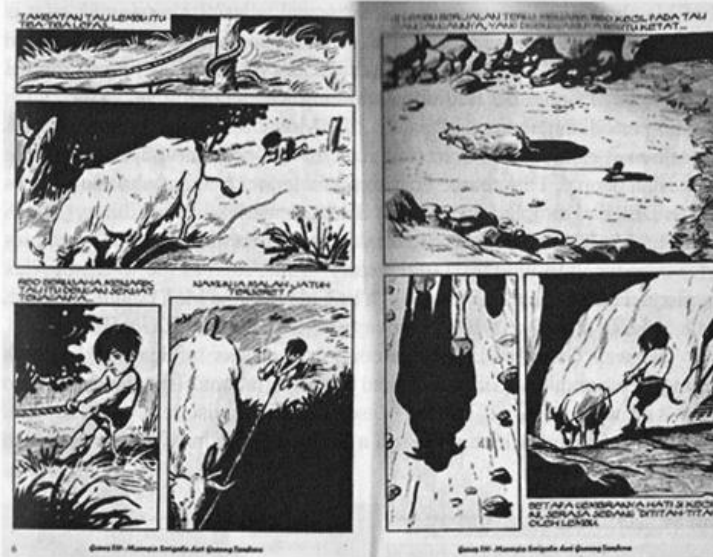
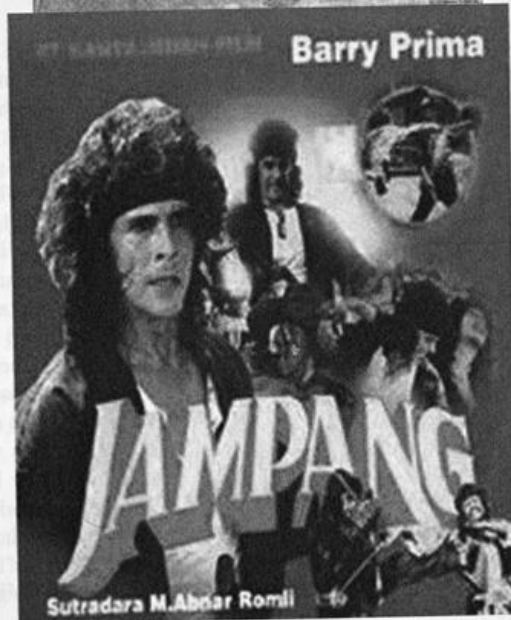
After emerging from his seclusion in the haunted cave, Barda was confronted with a more bitter reality, his beloved Marni turned out to be still alive, but had remarried. Feeling sad and angry, the blind Barda isolated himself and walked away. Together with his loyal monkey companion, Wanara, "The Blind" Barda Mandrawata travels to eradicate evil and to help the weak and oppressed throughout the islands, while seeking peace in his heart.

IJOCA, Spring/Summer 2020



Many of Ganes' comics also became movies, such as the "Si Buta dari Gua Hantu" series (1970s) and "Jampang" (1989).

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Compared to other comics artists from his era who used the martial arts genre, Ganesh added more local and Indonesian culture to his stories and symbols. It was very clear that the happenings were in Indonesia. Almost

all of his characters' movements were "pencak silat" style (*pencak silat* is Indonesian martial art style; of course, some movements were adopted from Chinese kung-fu). Clothes used by the characters were also very local, such as *sarong*, *kebaya*, and other traditional clothing which conformed to the Dutch colonial period. The names of places like Mount Tambora, Mount Merapi, or a talisman called Batu Geni (fire rock) were local and popular with the Indonesian people. This characteristic contrasted with Hans, who used names such as Dragon Door and Fox Stealth that were derived from China.

Ganesh TH essentially continued incorporating American comics styles introduced to Indonesia in the early 1930s, such as the works of Alex Raymond, Hal Foster, etc. Even though he had been Lee Man Fong's assistant, Lee's Chinese drawing styles did not appear in *Si Buta dari Goa Hantu*.

The way Ganesh TH drew a comic panel was influenced by movie making in the sequence of images and angle variations. This was similar to Teguh's drawing styles (Zahar and Masdiono, 2017), also influenced by film. Chiaroscuro lighting which was used a lot in Western movies was used also in Ganesh's drawing.



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