



Indonesian-French Critical Intercultural Literacy Through Digital Comics

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Abstract. Literacy is important to adapt to several changes in the current era. Literacy is seen as a learning process displayed through text and is an important starting point for facilitating French learners' critical intercultural literacy. Critical intercultural literacy plays an important role among French language learners. This activity is useful so that they can be open-minded towards foreign cultures without rejecting their original culture and so that they can have a fortress and filter against cultures that come from outside and global culture. In today's digital era, implementing intercultural literacy can be done by utilizing digital media, such as digital comics, which are the learner's preference. Digital media suits the character of Generation Z and meets the learning requirements in the 5.0 era. This article aims to describe digital comics that can support Indonesian-French intercultural literacy and detail critical intercultural literacy steps through digital comics. To achieve these goals, an intercultural approach is applied to identify cultural elements in digital comics, interpret them, and describe critical intercultural literacy steps through these comics. The analysis results show that digital comics contain French values, culture, and local Indonesian wisdom. Indonesian - French intercultural literacy using digital comics is carried out through 1) identification of digital comic elements, 2) identification of the similarities and differences in cultural elements and values in digital comics, and 3) development of critical thinking about cultural differences found in digital comics.

Keywords: digital comic, globalization, intercultural literacy

1 Introduction

In the 5.0 era, all aspects of life have become more modern and technology-based. Modernization brings dependence on technology in various aspects of life, including education. Technology and digitalization in the learning process are more desirable for millennial learners. Therefore, teachers must also be able to use, explore, and even create digital learning materials to respond to learning challenges in this digital era. These efforts need to be made to acquire intercultural competence through intercultural literacy. In this digital era, the implementation of cultural literacy is not only carried out directly through direct learning, but can also be done through various media and institutions, such as schools and institutions, television broadcasts, and online media [1]. The implementation of intercultural literacy is currently important so that it can be

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a fortress and filter against foreign cultures or global cultures that can interfere with the enculturation process of the original culture [2].

The process of intercultural literacy is can be supported by digital media. Digital media is a combination of electronic text, graphics, moving images, and sounds, in a structured digital environment allowing people to interact with the data [3]. According to Batubara (2021), digital learning media are learning media that operate through digital data, and produce a digital image that is processed, accessed, and distributed using digital devices, including computers, smartphones, digital television, and digital cameras, which are often used to both create and access digital media [4]. Amannulah (2019) states that digital learning aims to present a new learning situation and atmosphere for students because conventional learning no longer conforms to students' learning situations in the fully digital era of today. Using digital learning materials in the learning process makes learning activities more active, creative, effective, and fun [5].

Some digital learning materials used in the classroom are additional photos downloaded from social networks, digital comics, digital brochures and posters, songs, learning videos, animated videos, game applications, and the Internet. These media are taken advantage of to support learning with the aim of 1) increasing the capabilities of teachers, 2) improving the quality of learning; 3) fulfilling student's needs; 4) meeting the requirements of the new paradigm and 5) responding market's needs [4].

This article focuses on digital comics, specifically Webtoons, as a tool for intercultural literacy. Intercultural literacy describes the ability to interact and communicate within a community comprising individuals from diverse social classes. This theory can be defined as the ability to integrate into a cultural community, covering an understanding of the cultural context, proficiency in the language, participation in the community, and alignment with the community's values and norms [6]. It is also defined as an attitude, preparation, and competence to convey one's message and understand others as an intercultural communication.

2 Learning culture through comics

Before discussing digital comics, it is necessary to know the general definition of comics. According to McCloud, comics are a juxtaposition of pictorial images and other images in a deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and produce an aesthetic response from the reader [7]. McCloud also defines that words, images, and other icons constitute the vocabulary of the language called comics. There are several purposes conveyed in the process of creating comics as a medium for: 1) entertainment, 2) storytelling, 3) education, 4) expression and exploration, and 5) thoughts, viewpoints, and visual realities that occur at a given time, place and period or era they represent, 6) modern imperialism and 7) propaganda [7].

Furthermore, McCloud divides three different types of comics: 1) based on the form such as comic strips, comic strips, or graphic novels; 2) based on writing style: American

comics, Japanese comics, European comics; 3) based on media: printed comics and online comics [8]. The type of comics talked about in this article are digital or online comics. According to Rageul the expression "digital comic strip" is still wrongly used to designate traditional comic strips created digitally, with significant adaptations for distribution on digital media. The process of writing digital comics requires writing an interface, just like writing the images and story itself. The interface, interactivity, and images are three elements that must be present in the writing of digital comics [9]. Aside from printed media such as newspapers and magazines, the Internet can also be used as a medium for publishing comics. Readers can read online comics, which have a broader reach than those in print [10]. The choice of digital comic format is based on current conditions, responding to the challenges of the digital age so that the educational materials created also adapt to it, moving from print to multimedia format [11]

Several previous research results also served as references in carrying out this research. Ratnasari et al. tested the effectiveness of webtoons as a medium in narrative writing. Webtoon is a type of comic that has pictures and narration so it can make students write narrative texts more easily. The results of the experimental research that has been carried out show that there is an improvement in the results of narrative writing. The average score obtained before the treatment was 55, whereas after the treatment it increased to 69. The results of the study also showed that the majority of students agreed that Webtoons were useful for learning English, especially writing skills, so it could be concluded that webtoons were effective for developing skills. students in writing narrative texts [12].

Juniarto and Fahri tried webtoons as a medium for reading narrative texts and showed that teachers need interesting techniques to help students' difficulties in reading and attract students' attention and interest in learning. The technique used is the use of webtoon comics as a medium to motivate students to read narrative texts. The research aims to describe how to implement the use of webtoon comics to teach reading narrative texts, students' reading comprehension, and students' responses to this media. The research results show that Webtoon comics interest students in reading narrative texts. Most students can understand the text easily and student responses show they are interested in reading narrative texts using digital media, namely webtoon comics [13].

Fernandez discussed the development of a comic entitled "2", called a multimodal digital comic because it has a non-linear, interactive, coherent, and unique narrative. The choice of digital comic format is based on current conditions, namely responding to the challenges of the digital era so that the learning media created also adapts to this, transforming from print to multimedia format [11].

The previous research above shows that digital comics are not new to learning. Therefore, the research that will be carried out will also discuss digital comics, in this case, critical intercultural literacy media.

The use of comics as a learning medium was also applied by Ilhan, Kaba, and Sin who experimented with digital comics as an online learning media whose objective is to reveal the influence of digital comics on students' academic success, and students' views

on distance learning, using digital comics. As part of research conducted during the 2019-2020 school year, digital comic material was created in Pixton. The digital comic, without time or location limits, allows easy and quick access to information, prepared within distance learning framework, motivates learners, and increases their interest in lessons based on psychosocial development. Using digital comics in distance learning increases achievement and helps develop positive attitudes toward learning [14].

Comics, like other art forms, can function as a dominant means of representing national identity [15]. Indeed, comics seem to spontaneously fit into a set of modes of expression and cultural practices associated with the image but also promote its exploration and presence. Above all, it is not a barrier but an addition to culture, as Olivier Donnat shows about the cultural practices of the French. The number of French people over 15 reading comics is well above the national average. This shows that comics have shaped the culture of French society. Comics are considered true "visual stimulants" with cultural value [16]. Regarding comics and culture, Mulyati and Soetopo have utilized comics as a medium for cultural preservation [17].

3 Digital Comics as Media for Critical Intercultural Literacy

Intercultural literacy is an attitude, readiness, and competence to convey one's message and understand others in intercultural communication. Honna as quoted by Shliakhovchuk argues that the ability of intercultural literacy to reconcile cross-cultural differences in a mutually beneficial [18]. Critical intercultural literacy requires learners to examine the cultures, beliefs, and values that frame the meaning of texts, thereby negotiating partial cultural truths. Critical intercultural literacy seeks to engage ideology as the goal of reading and writing activities [19]. Attractive media is needed to foster interest in intercultural literacy. In line with this, Da Silva and Longhi (2013) stated that to achieve intercultural competence and understanding the first step is to find a media that is a cultural source, ideally as an authentic document [20].

One of the activities that constitutes the spirit of literacy activities is that of reading. Along with technology development, reading media is not limited to printed media such as books, newspapers, and printed magazines. The digital age allows unlimited access to digital literacy media, of which digital comics are an example.

Digital comics are a type of comics published in digital form be easy to distribute and accessible using different types of digital devices [4]. Since digital comics can be read online, this type of comic has a broader reach than print comics [10].

Many applications and software can be used to create digital or online comics, including: Toondoo, Pixton, and Strip Generator, which will then be published on the Webtoon. Digital comics, like Webtoon, are useful as learning mediums. Batubara cited the statements of Kristanti and Mursyidah (2019), Nurhayati et al (2018), Pandanwangi et al (2019) and Suparmi (2018) regarding the benefits of using digital comics as a learning medium, including 1) attract the attention of learners, 2) increase interest in learning, 3) clarify the material with pictures and narrative dialogue, 4) reduce boredom

in the learning process, 5) create pleasant learning conditions, 6) improve the quality of the learning process [4].

Being accessible online, digital comics can also be used as a support for Indonesian–French critical intercultural literacy, including four titles: 1) *Salut La France*, 2) *C'est Si Beau*, 3) *Bienvenue Chez Nous*, and 4) *Voilà Notre Tradition*. These comics took their scenes in Indonesia and France, more precisely in the cities of Semarang and Nice. The main character is called Laras, a girl from Semarang who invites readers to discover Indonesian and French culture through the dialogues and images of the comic strip.

For realizing Indonesian and French critical intercultural literacy, authentic media is needed so that readers have a real picture of socio-cultural phenomena in society. The digital comics already mentioned enable the process of critical intercultural literacy activities through the following steps:

3.1 Step 1: Identification of Comic’s Elements

Before exploring digital comics for critical intercultural literacy, we need to identify its elements. The main lines of the comic are contained in Table 1 below:

Table 1. main lines of comics

Webtoons	Characters	Backstage	Synopsis	Cultural elements
<i>Salut La France!</i>	- Laras: main character, student from Semarang - A taxi driver - A french woman	- Paris - Charles de Gaule airport - Lyon station - Nice station	Laras is taking part in training in Nice. The first time she arrived in France, she learned new things like having to do everything herself. She carried her heavy suitcase herself, there were no porters at the airport and train station. From Charles de Gaule airport, she continues her journey to Gare de Lyon by taxi. On the way, Laras imagines seeing famous Parisian monuments like	- Geography - Transportation - Landmark

Webtoons	Characters	Backstage	Synopsis	Cultural elements
			<p>the Eiffel Tower and the Arc de Triomphe but the taxi does not pass through these lines. Arriving at the station, Laras is a little confused looking for the train line to Nice. Laras gets on the train, but she doesn't know that her place is on the 2nd floor, Laras lifts her big suitcase with difficulty, and fortunately, a man helps her put the suitcase on the shelf. A novelty for Laras, the suitcase is not brought to the seat, but placed on the shelf. And don't worry, the suitcases are safe there.</p>	
<p><i>C'est Si Beau!</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Laras : Indonesian student taking summer class at Nice, French - Lacroix family: Laras' host family in France, composed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - City of Nice - Massena Square - Old City - Promenade des Anglais 	<p>Laras has arrived in Nice. There, she lives with a French family, on the 3rd floor of an apartment. The Lacroix family has 2 children, the first is Louise, who is 20 years old and lives separately from them. The second, Daniel is 7 years</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Daily and family life - Regional gastronomy: regional meals and cuisine; wine, cheese, tableware - Public transport

Webtoons	Characters	Backstage	Synopsis	Cultural elements
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> of Mr. Lacroix, Mrs. Lacroix, their two children, Louise and Daniel - Hermonie : a friend of Laras on the tramway - 		<p>old. Every day, Laras has classes from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. and as it is winter, French families are not used to getting up early. So Laras gets up early and prepares his French breakfast by drinking tea, coffee, or chocolate and eating bread or croissants.</p> <p>Laras used to dine with the Lacroix family. The dinner menu usually consists of salad, meat, or fish with potatoes. Cheese is always available on the table. The Lacroix family also drinks wine with dinner, and since Laras is a Muslim woman, she only drinks juice or soda.</p>	
<p><i>Bienvenue Chez Nous</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Laras : student of French language at Semarang - Laras brother, student of urbanism - Louise : friend of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Semarang city - Lawang Sewu - Tugu Muda - Ranggawarsito museum - Old City 	<p>Laras returned to Semarang. It's the school holidays. Louise Lacroix and her cousin, Antoine spend the summer holidays in Indonesia as well as a visit to Laras. During their stay in Semarang, Laras</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Character and daily activities - Transportation system - Touristic site - gastronomy

Webtoons	Characters	Backstage	Synopsis	Cultural elements
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Laras from France - Antoine : Louise's cousin - 		<p>accompanies them to tour Semarang and shows them its traditional culture. Laras invites them to take a tour of the city in the "Si Kenang" tourist bus, visiting traditional markets to taste traditional foods. They also take photos at Lawang Sewu, an iconic building in Semarang. Not to mention they take a rickshaw, a traditional means of transportation that still works in Semarang. Louise and Antoine enjoy their trip.</p>	
<i>Et Voilà Notre Tradition</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Laras : student of French language at Semarang - Rangga : Laras brother, student of urbanism - Louise : a friend of Laras from France - Antoine : Louise's cousin - 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Semarang city - Taman Budaya Raden Saleh 	<p>On another occasion, Laras also presents the cultural tradition of Semarang. She takes Louise and Antoine to Taman Budaya to watch a puppet show. Before the show starts, they have the opportunity to see the <i>Gambang Semarang</i> dance which is a typical dance from Semarang. Louise joins the dance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dance and spectacles - instruments of traditional music - story of <i>Wayang</i>

Webtoons	Characters	Backstage	Synopsis	Cultural elements
			from her seat. Louise and Antoine love watching the puppet show, even though they don't understand the Javanese language. They compare it to the theater in France, the difference is that in the theater the actors often sing classical songs. However, for <i>Wayang</i> , there is more dialogue.	

The four comics explored as critical intercultural literacy media are set in France and Indonesia. The comics *Salut la France* and *C'est Si Beau* tell the adaptation of Laras, an Indonesian girl who stayed in France for 2 weeks. She had to get used to cultural practices that she did not encounter in Indonesia, such as breakfast menus, metro transportation and French daily habits. On the other hand, in the comics *Bienvenue Chez Nous* and *Et Voilà Notre Tradition*, it is Louise's turn as a French person to get to know and adapt to life in Indonesia. She gained the experience of getting to know and watching traditional Javanese performances, riding a *becak* as a means of transportation which is rare in Indonesia and eating on a *lesehan* without tables, chairs, spoons, and forks. Identification of elements in this comic is useful for the next step in critical intercultural literacy.

3.2 Step 2: Identification of T Similarities and Differences in Cultural Elements and Values in Digital Comics

As previously indicated, assuming that all Western cultures are distinct from Eastern cultures is inaccurate. The next step is to identify and explore the similarities between different countries' cultural practices based on their cultural forms. This form of culture includes ideas, activities, and artifacts. Following the identification phase, the subsequent step is similarize, which entails the revelation of the cultural parallels between two contrasting countries. This activity aims to narrow existing differences, promote the equality of norms and values inherent in cultural products and practices, and facilitate mutual understanding. The objective of the similarize phase is to develop

the ability to comprehend and relate texts and events from other cultures, as well as to explain and relate them to their cultural context [21].

Table 2. Identification of Indonesian and French Culture in Comics

Elemen	Indonesian culture	French culture
Geography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Indonesia is a tropical country having two seasons. In January, it's raining season with normal temperature form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - France is subtropical country, having four seasons. It's still winter in French during January. Temperature in Paris is colder than in Nice.
Landmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Several monuments such as Tugu Muda, Lawang Sewu, Sam Po Kong Temple, Old City - Simpang Lima is a large square in Semarang becoming a centre of this city. - Several monuments such as Tugu Muda, Lawang Sewu, Sam Po Kong Temple, Old City 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Several monuments such as Eiffel Tower, Massena Square, Old City. - Like every city in French, Nice has Massena square as city centre.
Public transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Becak</i> is a traditional public transport that still operates in several cities. There is also a new popular transport namely ojek that can be found everywhere. - Payment is usually by cash or electronic money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - French is known for its modern transport namely metro operating in big city. There is also a tramway in cities that don't have metro network. - Passengers must have a ticket to ride public transportation, which can be a one-way ticket or a subscription card for a week or a month.
Gastronomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The main character introduces Indonesian traditional food such as <i>rendang</i>, <i>soto</i>, <i>satay</i>, <i>gado-gado</i> and <i>wedang ronde</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The main character tastes for the first time <i>Socca</i> and <i>pizzaladiere</i> as Nice traditional food. - French people are not used to eating heavy food at breakfast. They use to have

Elemen	Indonesian culture	French culture
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Indonesian people have a habit of eating heavy food like rice, noodle, and porridge at breakfast. - The composition of three meals is always the same, with rice as a main course. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bread, omelette or cereal for breakfast, and accompanied by coffee. - Dinner consists of a complete meal: appetizer, main course, desert, with cheese and win always served on the table.
Spectacle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dance “Gambang Semarang” is presented before spectacle of Wayang Orang. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is a traditional dance namely Can Can. French famous spectacle is theatre and cabaret show.
Musical instrument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gamelan is Indonesian traditional musical instrument played not only in Java but also in other region like Bali. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accordion is known as French traditional musical instrument, more often played in the region of Bretagne and Normandie

From Table 2, it is known that although there are differences in the culture practiced in France and Indonesia, there are still similarities found for example, both Indonesia and France have Old City as tourist destinations. The two countries also have a square as the center of the city. These similarities prove that not all French cultures are different from our culture.

3.3 Step 3 : Development of Critical Thinking about Cultural Differences Found in Digital Comics

The final step in critical intercultural literacy is an analytical thinking process to respond to the cultural phenomena of two countries. Byram defines this critical thinking as *savoir s'engager*, which can be translated as "critical cultural awareness". This term refers to the ability to evaluate perspectives, practices, and products in one culture and in another country based on clear criteria. This vision implies the capacity to respond, critically evaluate, provide a point of view on foreign cultures' values, practices, and products, and compare them with other cultures [22]. Through critical intercultural literacy, it is possible to develop several values as follows:

1) Openness to foreign cultures

Critical intercultural literacy emerges an open mindset towards foreign cultures, without forgetting their own culture. Figure 1 shows Laras' efforts to open his mindset towards French cultural icons.



Fig 1. Representation of naked statue in Massena Square

Louise pointed out the statue of the naked god Apollo in the center of Massena Square, an icon of the city of Nice. Laras, as an Indonesian, certainly feels a bit uncomfortable seeing naked statues. Laras' sentence describes what might happen if there were a similar statue in Indonesia, perhaps it will be covered with cloth or even torn down. Indirectly, Laras' sentence reflects that this is not by Indonesian culture. However, Louise tried to open Laras' mindset to become accustomed to similar things. What needs to be emphasized in intercultural understanding is accepting foreign culture, but not being carried away by it, if the culture is not one's own culture.

2) Emergence of tolerance

The gastronomic theme presents a message of tolerance towards people from different cultures. Figure 2 presents the scene of the Lacroix family dinner. As usual, the French family dinner menu consists of 3 parts: appetizers, main course, and dessert, and is accompanied by cheese which is always present in the eating ritual. Lacroix family's dinner menu that night was explicitly described as avocado salad as an appetizer, mashed potatoes, turkey as the main course, and sweet steamed apple as dessert. The dinner ritual is incomplete without wine. Wine is a mandatory drink in every French meal, as well as a Lacroix family meal.

Concerning dishes, intercultural understanding is not only applied by Laras as a foreign person in France but also by the Lacroix family. They knew that Laras was a Muslim woman and did not consume alcohol or pork. So as long as Laras lived in their house, they didn't cook pork. They also provide non-alcoholic drinks such as juice and soda for Laras.

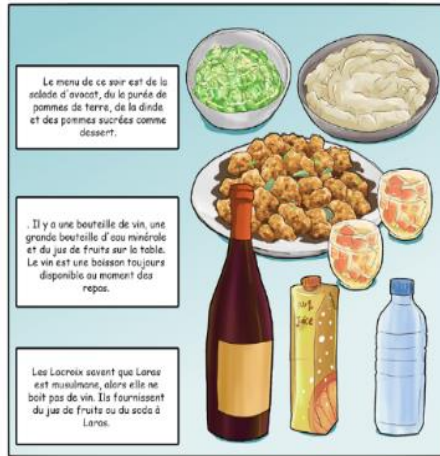


Fig 2. Dinner’s meal in Lacroix family

3) Cultural Promotion

Comics become a good medium for promoting culture. Promotion of Indonesian culture is also presented in the comic *Et Voilà Notre Tradition*, by introducing traditional Indonesian food to Louise and Antoine. As seen at figure 3, Laras ordered traditional Javanese food as their dinner menu: *soto*, *satay*, *ayam penyet bebek kremes* and *wedang ronde*.



Fig 3. Dinner’s menu in Semarang

Soto and *satay* are symbols of Indonesian national identity because these foods are well-known by local people and tourists who come to Indonesia. Laras' step is to promote local Indonesian cultural products to her friends from France. The different foods chosen symbolize the diversity in Indonesia, traditional Indonesian food in each city has different characteristics and presentation. Besides introducing traditional food, Laras also introduced the way of eating *lesehan* to her friends. *Lesehan* is a Javanese culture that is usually done at religious events or eating together by sitting on the floor,

using hands directly to feed food to the mouth, without using a spoon and fork. This habit illustrates togetherness and simplicity in Javanese eating activities.

4) Cultural acculturation

Cultural acculturation is also transferred by intercultural literacy through digital comics, where there is a scene when Laras cooked *rendang*, one of world-famous Indonesian traditional cuisine as shown in Figure 4.



Fig 4. The way to cook *rendang*

The interesting thing lies in the ingredients used by Laras for cooking *rendang*. Because cooking *rendang* takes a long time, up to 6 hours, Laras tried to make *rendang* in a shorter time, by using ground meatballs instead of whole meat. Ground meat balls can easily be found in French supermarkets and by using ground beef balls, Laras could save a lot of time for cooking *rendang*. While the process of cooking *rendang*, there is an acculturation of French culture into Indonesian culture, by replacing beef with ground beef balls.

The critical activities carried out in intercultural literacy that have been explained can be expanded by asking for students' opinions and points of view about different cultural phenomena between Indonesia and France. They can determine attitudes towards cultural practices not encountered, such as nude statues displayed in public places, whether it is a form of aesthetic expression or something against the norms of decency upheld by the Indonesian nation. Apart from that, it is necessary to express the learner's feelings as an Indonesian, knowing that typical Indonesian food is known and appreciated by French people. A sense of pride in their products needs to be developed so that they are not dazzled by the splendor of foreign cultures that are currently spreading in Indonesia. In the end, this critical intercultural literacy fosters tolerance towards foreign cultures and a greater love for their own culture.

4 Conclusion

The representations of cultural elements and products in comics are shown explicitly, notably in the dialogues and scenes supporting the images, and implicitly through the meaning of the dialogues and the visualizations that appear. This reading source could be used as Indonesian-French critical intercultural literacy support. Values found in digital comics include: 1) openness to foreign cultures, 2) emergence of tolerance, 3) promotion of culture, and 4) cultural acculturation. critical intercultural literacy fosters an attitude of tolerance towards foreign cultures and a greater love for their own culture. By reading these digital comics, readers can learn that Indonesian culture is highly appreciated by foreigners. Therefore, Indonesian readers must not forget their own culture. The younger generation is also expected to be familiar with traditional culture such as traditional cuisine, gamelan instruments, and *lesehan* as a way of eating.

Disclosure of Interests.

The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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