# ANIMATION RESEARCH: CONSTRUCTING BANGSAWAN IN 2D FORMAT

# KAJIAN ANIMASI: PEMBANGUNAN BANGSAWAN DALAM FORMAT 2D

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#### Abstract

This paper presented is a Doctor of Philosophy degree research in progress by the first named presenter of the paper. The paper shares her experiences and efforts in constructing a 2D animation work of the *Bangsawan* theatre. The work process involves a good understanding of the *Bangsawan* live theatre phenomenon and to construct an original script taken from the Malay historical source of *Hikayat Seri Kelantan*. The major part however is the animation work process of the *Bangsawan* story set within the *Bangsawan* format of live theatre. To construct the 2D animation work, it is decided upon the choice of projecting the tale of a female Malay ruler, Puteri Saadong of Kelantan whose reign was during the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

**Keywords**: *Bangsawan*, 2D animation, digital technology, Hikayat Seri Kelantan, story construction.

#### Abstrak

Artikel ini membincangkan kajian yang sedang dijalankan oleh penulis pertama dan berkongsi tatakerja yang terlibat dalam usaha mengkonstruk teater Bangsawan dalam bentuk persembahan animasi 2D. Bagi memastikan skrip yang ditulis menepati ciri-ciri drama Bangsawan sebenar, kajian ini menuntut pemahaman pengkaji terhadap fenomena Bangsawan. Skrip kajian ini dibuat berdasarkan sumber dari Hikayat Seri Kelantan. Bahagian penting dalam kajian ini

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adalah kerja pembangunan animasi yang memilih untuk menampilkan cerita Puteri Saadong; seorang pemerintah wanita dari Kelantan yang berakhir pada abad ke-18.

*Kata kunci:* Bangsawan, animasi 2D, teknologi digital, Hikayat Seri Kelantan, pembinaan cerita.

## **Previous Studies**

Academicians and researcher worldwide have been doing researches in the area of old traditions in relation to new technologies. Through their research, Mohd Izani and Aishah (2003) developed and evaluated the effectiveness of Malay folklore storytelling in the form of interactive 3D animation. The focus of this research was mainly education with interactive material and highlighting animation as a new medium to represent traditional cultural.

Nor Azan, Nur Yuhanis<sup>2</sup> & Munirah (2010) had also conducted a similar research by developing and presenting Malay folklores in an interactive-animated edutainment software called *MyEdutale*. 2D animation technology was used to develop the stories in various presentation modes such as animated story, *syair* and *peribahasa* (Malay proverbs). The developed software was then evaluated for usability and the findings indicated users' acceptance towards the folklore-oriented software.

Rall (2011) thought that although Asian countries have diversified arts and traditions due to multi-racial citizens, little were presented in the form of animation. Asian mythologies were analyzed in his research and six stories were chosen to be developed into animated films which integrated local design elements and aesthetic philosophy of the stories' origin countries respectively. It is strongly believed that animation stories with traditional cultural influence have the potential to success without having to imitate the established Japan and American style of animation.

Compared to the first two researches discussed above, Rall's research is much closer to the authors' current research. Rall (2011) focused on how to transform or adapt folk stories into animated version

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> -ibid-

without neglecting cultural elements whereas the other two researches were much more into instructional design for educational purposes.

There is also a project based in the United Kingdom which produced animation as a tool in preserving cultural heritage of the minority India community. The project is named Adivasi Arts Trust and through the project, five short stories from Indian tribal folktales were developed in animation form, conveying wisdom and moral values in the storyline (Sharma, 2012).

#### **Research Focus**

*Bangsawan* is a form of Malay traditional theatre which was once famous as entertainment around the year 1902 to 1935 (Nur Nina, 1992). It started to decline due to the outbreak of World War II and the Japanese occupation in *Tanah Melayu* (Nur Nina, 1992; Tan, 1993). However *Bangsawan* manages to survive until now although it is no longer as popular as it used to be. The effort to revive *Bangsawan* has been taken into action by the government as well as other organizations, for example by introducing *Seri Semarak Bangsawan* since 2007 till now and airing *Bangsawan* series on television (Nor Akmar, 2012).

With the advancement and rapid changes in the world of technology as we are in today, people's activities are more and more seen to revolve around technology. The whiteboard, or its predecessor the blackboard, has been upstaged by the computer and projector as a preferred instructional medium; nowadays greeting cards are sent via emails as digital cards; internet banking has reduced the hassle of waiting in long queues for bank services over the counter. These are only some of the examples of how technology has changed the way people live. The landscape of entertainment has also changed. When people were once entertained through live performances of shows like wayang kulit, makyung, dikir barat and also bangsawan; with the current technological trends, new modes of entertainment via the digital medium of television and computer screens are taking its hold on the general public. People prefer to become couch potatoes being entertained by watching full length movies or drama series on television or via the Internet. Although live theatres still exist, technology has opened up the possibilities of how people get entertained anywhere at any time through all sorts of available media nowadays.

Besides having live action stories, the world has been introduced with animation. Animation or cartoon has become part of the entertainment industry worldwide. Walt Disney Studio in the United States is one of the famous production house in producing animated movies in the format of three dimensional (3D) and two dimensional (2D) animation. Japan is another country which is famous in producing animation stories especially 2D animation television series. Nowadays, Malaysia has also been actively producing animation not just for local viewers but also for the international market. This can be evidently seen through the recent availability of animated series of *Upin And Ipin* which has deserved a slot in the Disney Channel of Astro.

This research sees the potential to present an old form of entertainment in a modern format. *Bangsawan* which is usually staged for live performance would be great to be presented in a new and different approach. For this research, a 2D animation project is conducted to develop a *Bangsawan* story. Further discussion in this paper will be on the process of developing an animation product in *Bangsawan* style. The research chose to do an adaptation from the book *Hikayat Seri Kelantan* and the title of the story gleened from the book is *Bangsawan Puteri Saadong*.

## **Research Process: Script Writing**

A *Bangsawan* story can be delivered in an episodic format (Nur Nina, 1992). This was usually practiced for long and dragging stories. For the purpose of this research, the animation for *Bangsawan Puteri Saadong* will be constructed in eleven episodes to maintain viewers' interest in the story as well as to share the knowledge that episodes are applicable in a *Bangsawan* repertoire involving the 2D animated format of construction.

The script for this research is based on *Hikayat Seri Kelantan*; an old Malay manuscript which was translated from *Jawi* to roman writing by Mohd Taib Osman in 1961 for his post graduate research which was then republished in 2004 by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP). Basically, *Hikayat Seri Kelantan* was about the Kingdom of Kelantan in yesteryear following the legendary rule of Cik Siti Wan Kembang. For the purpose of this research, only part of the story in the manuscript was used, the one that consist of the story of Puteri Saadong, her successor. Only part of the full story of Puteri Saadong is chosen, focusing on the dramatic preference of her abduction to Siam for adaptation into 2D animation.

## Puteri Saadong as in Hikayat Seri Kelantan

In *Hikayat Seri Kelantan*, it was told that Puteri Saadong was adopted by Cik Siti Wan Kembang for she had no descendant to inherit her throne and kingdom. The talk about Puteri Saadong's beauty was widely spread and reached the knowledge of a neighboring king, the king of Siam. To avoid her princess from the interest of Siam, Cik Siti Wan Kembang arranged a marriage between Puteri Saadong and Raja Abdullah from Jembal. After the marriage, Cik Siti Wan Kembang passed over the throne to be ruled by her daughter and son-in-law together. Cik Siti Wan Kembang then went to rest in another place called Gunung Ayam and was never mentioned again in the historical annal of *Hikayat Seri Kelantan*.

Puteri Saadong and Raja Abdullah (now named Sultan Abdullah) began their rulership and everything went happily for the couple until Siam came to know about Puteri Saadong's beauty and the King of Siam wanted her for himself. The Siam king was still interested in her despite the knowledge that the princess had become Sultan Abdullah's consort. Naturally, Sultan Abdullah refused the request from Siam for the hand of Puteri Saadong. Consequently, Siam attacked Puteri Saadong and Sultan Abdullah's kingdom. The first onslaught by Siam upon Kelantan was defeated. But concerned about the wellbeing of her people, Puteri Saadong used her mystical power to bring her entire palace to a new place where it would be inaccessible to reach. However, within the Siam army troop, there was a shaman who practices magic and he found Puteri Saadong's new hideout. The Siam army once again attacked the palace. This time the palace was surrounded and Puteri Saadong must succumb to Siam's request to have her brought back to Siam; but not without a final attempt by Sultan Abdullah to save his consort. However, the ruse was of no avail and Puteri Saadong had to step in with her royal decision of accepting the Siam decree that she goes to the Siam kingdom.

While in Siam, Puteri Saadong maintained her dignity and pride as a ruler of Kelantan. The King of Siam who was fascinated by the beauty of the princess was so enamored of her that he could not hold back his lust any longer. One night he went to her quarters bent on having her. Puteri Saadong was ready for such a consequence. She splashed the King's face with a type of water, said to be *air pinang*. As a result the king's face became disfigured with a strange skin illness. The King went into retreat in his palace. Nobody could cure him. Finally, the King of Siam entreated for Puteri Saadong's help. He gave his promise that if his illness is cured Siam would never again try to overtake Kelantan and Puteri Saadong as the queen would be free to return to her own country. The king was finally cured of his skin disease and true to his words not only let Puteri Saadong return to his beloved husband but equipped her with all the royal entourage befitting of a queen.

The story of Puteri Saadong as mentioned in *Hikayat Seri Kelantan* continued until she abdicated her kingdom and was no longer heard of again. This was after she discovered that her husband the Sultan had been unfaithful to her despite her sacrifice for his wellbeing. The *Hikayat* tells that Puteri Saadong killed her husband out of uncontrolled royal rage after being devastated by his untoward action. Puteri Saadong left Kelantan to the rule of the Jembal royal descendants.

Language-wise, the *Hikayat* was written in Malay-Kelantan dialect. The writing style was in old-Malay narration which is not as direct as the current Malay language used today. Therefore, the story in *Hikayat Seri Kelantan* is neither an easy reading nor easy to understand.

## **Research Process: The Adaptation Of Puteri Saadong Story**

According to Saputra (2009), adaptation can be done in three ways; entirely based on the original text, based only on the conflict of the original story or by constructing a totally new story. In the case of this research, the adaptation was done by making expansion to the story based on the conflict. Through the adaptation, some of the original parts of the story were added and dropped where needed and when thought necessary. Add-and-drop process is common in adaptation from source text to a new form or version.

The ending for the adapted story written for this research is at the point when Puteri Saadong was on her triumphant way back to her own kingdom after curing the King of Siam of his affliction. Personally, the researcher thought that the story after Puteri Saadong was reunited with her husband consists of aggressive elements which does not augur well within the current context of Islamic nationhood nor suited to the local moral value. As in a *Bangsawan* performance, the story presented must usually convey positive lessons and poeticjustice where good deeds will be rewarded while malice will fail (Nur Nina 1992; Tan 1993).To construct a happy ending story, it is decided that the story stop at the triumphant point when Puteri Saadong was returning to her own kingdom from Siam. Only a cue was given as to what was to ensue when in the research version, Puteri Saadong although happy to return to her husband was quite filled with anxiety on the prospect of reuniting with Sultan Abdullah.

The whole storyline for *Bangsawan Puteri Saadong* is constructed using Freytag's pyramid (Freytag, 1968) and Aristotle's model (Hatcher 1996). The famous philosopher, Aristotle (384BC - 322BC), suggested six elements that a story should have; which are plot, character, theme, language, rhythm and spectacle (Hatcher 1996). He introduced a unified plot model to give a structure to a story which is built with a beginning, middle and end-part. Freytag (1968) modified the model by adding rising and falling action to the structure. Diagram 1 shows Freytag's pyramid as a result to his modification of Aristotle's triangle.



**Diagram 1**: Freytag's and Aristotle's triangle **Source**: Cunningham (n.d.)

There are five elements in Freytag's pyramid - exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and denouement. Every element plays an important role in shaping up a story but climax is the most important part where no other element should over-shadow it (Rahmah, 1994). Climax is where the conflict of a story is being delivered dramatically and could be of anything that gives emotional impact to viewers such as a war scene, a terrible accident, a separation and etcetera. Each element is a continuation from the previous element in the model. Exposition is where the big picture of a story is presented. This part acts as the background of a story where information like time, place, environment, characters and the initiation of complication are introduced to viewers or readers. Rising action follows exposition where complication starts to build up. For example, rising action could be a conspiracy and forbidden love (Freytag, 1968). This is an essential part where the main motive of a story is being presented. Climax comes after rising action and is followed by falling action. Falling action presents the consequence or conflict solution. This is where the essence of a story is being clearly elaborated towards a positive or negative ending, for example, a truce in war or reunion after a long separation. The last element is denouement where viewers/readers should already be able to expect based on the falling action. Denouement concludes a story and could also embed an element of surprise to make the ending more intriguing (Freytag, 1968).

Based on the five elements, issues as appear in the Puteri Saadong story in *Hikayat Seri Kelantan* are clustered accordingly as shown in Table 1.

Element	Issue Rises In The Story Of
	Puteri Saadong
Exposition	Puteri Saadong is the adopted daughter of Cik Siti Wan Kembang, ruler of Negeri Serendah Kebun Bunga Cherangtegayung.
	Puteri Saadong marries Raja Abdullah and inherits the throne.

 Table 1: Issues in the story of Puteri Saadong clustered according to Freytag's Pyramid.

Rising action	King Siam wants to own Puteri Saadong.
	Siam attack Sultan Abdullah's kingdom in order to get Puteri Saadong.
	Puteri Saadong follows Siam army troop back to Siam in exchange for the peace of her kingdom.
Climax	Puteri Saadong protects her pride and dignity from King Siam.
	Puteri Saadong splashes a mystical water towards King Siam.
Falling action	King Siam gets skin illness from the water that Puteri Saadong splashed him with.
	The skin illness will only be cured by Puteri Saadong.
Denouement	Puteri Saadong maintains her dignity and sails back to her kingdom in Kota Jelasin.

## Research Process: Script Development With Bangsawan Element

For this research, the animation story of Puteri Saadong is conveyed in the *Bangsawan* style of performance. Thus, the script for the story is written within a bangsawan element which is different from other form of drama in terms of the dialogue. Dialogue is referred as a conversation or message verbally uttered by a character (Abdul Samat, 2006). A good dialogue is a sentence of words being delivered clearly, in a compact and precise manner (Parker, 2009). In *Bangsawan*, the dialogue uses language with poetic prose and can be delivered melodically in style by the use of pantun, singing, gurindam, syair, bernasib and etcetera (Abdul Samat, 2006). If a dialogue is being uttered in a normal intonation, the end of the sentence will still be exaggerated (Abdul Samat, 2006). Extra-turn is another element in a *Bangsawan* performance. It refers to interlude act which is usually presented to fill the gap between two scenes while the backdrop of the stage is being replaced (Abdul Samat, 2006; Rahmah, 2007). An extra-turn can be of any act or show, for instance a magic show, acrobatic, dance, comedy, singing and so forth. Although the process of replacing backdrop does not happen in developing the animation of Puteri Saadong in this research, extra-turn scenes are still being presented to maintain the unique identity of a *Bangsawan* performance.

Language-wise, although the story of Puteri Saadong is based on a princess from Kelantan which is a state with a strong dialect culture, the script is written in Malay language, specifically in *Bahasa Istana* (royal language) because in *Bangsawan*, dialect can be ignored. In bangsawan, the standard *bahasa istana* is used despite of which state the story is from (Tan, 1993).

#### a. The Theme

The world of Malay traditional literature is wide and rich with a plethora of stories. It was not an easy task to decide on a story to be used for this research. After going through reading a number of Malay traditional and classical stories, the story of Puteri Saadong was chosen as the source of adaptation for this research. Puteri Saadong as presented in Hikayat Seri Kelantan and a few other manuscripts (Riwayat Kelantan and Hikayat Puteri Saadong) depicted the princess as a strong character who stood for her own rights and at the same time would note hesitate to sacrifice herself for the safety of her people. This makes the story more outstanding since it was about a warrior princess instead of a male warrior like most stories read by the researcher.

For this research version, the story of Puteri Saadong is written as a classic-contemporary story with a pinch of comedy in the storyline. This is achieved with the help of the characters' individual attitude and dialogues. To make the adaptation of the story interesting, *Bangsawan*style of performance in animated form was decided to be the mode of presentation. This decision was made since the many genres of Malay performing art can be presented through *Bangasawan* such as in the singing, dancing and acting. Therefore, the animated story version of Puteri Saadong will not just be an ordinary animation but a story that is full of Malay cultural elements. It is also decided to present the story in *Bangsawan* style for the compatibility of Puteri Saadong story with *Bangsawan* performance which usually presents stories of royal families, aristocrats and fairies (Rahmah, 2007).

#### b. The Characters

Characters in a *Bangsawan* performance are usually created to suit the criteria of aristocrats. They are referred as stock characters or stock types which have the same persona in any other *Bangsawan* show and can be easily identified through the movement, attires, expression and body-language (Tan, 1993; Abdul Samat, 2006; Rahmah, 2007).

Stock characters can be divided into two groups; *watak halus* (the aristocrats) and *watak kasar* (the supporting cast) (Tan, 1993). *Watak halus* refers to *Seri Panggung* (the heroin eg. a princess), *Orang Muda* (the hero eg. a prince) and Raja (the king). while *watak kasar* refers to antagonist characters like a pirate or a genie (Tan, 1993; Abdul Samat, 2006).

For this research, characters in the story are mostly based on the source text. The main characters are Puteri Saadong, Raja/Sultan Abdullah and the King of Siam. Some new characters which do not exist in the text are also created to make the story more interesting. These characters play the role as supporting characters such as Jin Afrit and royal maids.

#### c. The Setting

The setting or scenography is defined as the "creation of stage space" (Howard, 2002). This includes every element that makes up a stage such as sound, light, structure, props, backdrop as well as the costumes and performance of actors.

The whole and complete story written for this research is divided into eleven episodes. Each episode comes in a number of scenes. The scenes may take place in a few different locations such as garden-view, the interior of Puteri Saadong's palace, the interior of King of Siam's palace and so on; all of which is visualized by the use of different graphics as the backdrop. The idea of changing the backdrop is for the purpose of keeping in tandem with the actuality of place setting as well as it is the practice of a real life *Bangsawan* performance; since the form applies the use of drop-curtain sets. The same goes for the rest of the elements which are designed to reflect and maintain the real performance of a drama in the *Bangsawan* genre.

# Research Process: 2D Animation Development Of *Bangsawan* Puteri Saadong

For this research, a two-dimension (2D) animation story of Puteri Saadong is developed. The mode for the animation is in a *Bangsawan* performance where the setting, props and characters are all created like a real-life *Bangsawan* style. This section will discuss more on technical aspect involved in the animation development process.

## a) Animation and the Technique

Graphic is the most important element in 2D animation. The process of animating involves basic objects or graphics to be manipulated in terms of the coordinate, movement, angle and shape (Jamaluddin & Zaidatun, 2005). Although the world of animation has evolved a lot since the industry started to be recognized, 2D animation is still relevant and acceptable. This can be seen through the number of animation series and advertisement on television that are based on 2D animation.

Before computer technology was introduced, animation was done manually through a series of processes. Graphics were handdrawn or figurines were modeled. Then the graphics or figurines were captured or recorded in sequence of frames to later be played rapidly to create animation. Now, with the help of computer hardware and software, animation process has changed to become more efficient. New techniques are introduced to help animators in producing animation speedily and with quality. One of the most popular techniques to develop animation is limited-animation technique which is cost and time efficient. This is the technique chosen for this research which can be divided into three phases; pre-production, production and post-production (Wyatt, 2010). Adobe Flash CS6 is the platform used in this research to develop the animation story of Bangsawan Puteri Saadong. The discussion on the animation process will be done based on the activities involved in using limited-animation technique with Adobe Flash CS6.

#### i. Pre-production

In the initial process of an animation project, the idea and concept of the story to be developed must be clear to everybody involved. For this research, the idea is to do an adaptation story of Puteri Saadong based on an old Malay manuscript, the *Hikayat Seri Kelantan*. The concept is to present the story in a *Bangsawan* performance style in the form of a 2D animation series.

A script is written for the story, followed by storyboarding. Storyboard is used as a visual guide to represent the information based on the script. Diagram 2 is an example of the storyboard developed for this research.



Figure 2: Page 1 of Storyboard for Bangsawan Puteri Saadong



Figure 3: Page 2 of Storyboard for Bangsawan Puteri Saadong



Figure 4: Page 3 of Storyboard for Bangsawan Puteri Saadong

## i. Production

In a small-scale animation project, dialogue of audio recording is usually done before the process of animation (Wyatt 2010). This will allow the animator to estimate the duration of the final animation product through the recorded audio (Kirkpatrick & Peaty 2002). For this research, audio is recorded using an audio editor software called Sonic Sound Forge.

For animation, as mentioned earlier, this research use Adobe Flash CS6 as the main platform for the development activity. Drawing and animating are mostly done here. The technique used to animate is limited-animation technique which allow a graphic to be reused again and again (Kirkpatrick & Peaty 2002; Wyatt 2010). For instance, by using limited-animation technique to make a car move, the graphic of a car can be separated into two individual graphics; the body of a car and the tyre. Only one drawing of a tyres needed and the same graphic of the tyre can be used to represent the other tyre as shown in Diagram 5.



Figure 5: Graphics used to animate a car.

For this research, characters are drawn according to the same rule as in animating a car. Every part of a body are separated into a few individual parts to optimize the process of animating (Wyatt 2010). As a sample, Diagram 6 shows the separated graphics drawn to make a whole-complete character of Puteri Saadong.



Figure 6: The Character of Puteri Saadong (made of a number of individual graphics).

## ii. Post-production

The last phase in an animation project is to debug or to make correction on errors or flaws. At this stage, it is best to view the whole animation story to look for parts that need to be adjusted.

Diagram 7 until 11 are examples of screenshot taken from the final product of *Bangsawan Puteri Saadong* developed for this research.

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Figure 7: Screenshot of the Introduction for Episode 1.



Figure 8: Screenshot of Episode 1.



Figure 9: Screenshot of Cik Siti Wan Kembang character.



Figure 10: Screenshot of Raja Siam character (The King of Siam).



Figure 11: Screenshot of Raja Abdullah character.

## **Research Process: Evaluation Process**

It is planned that after the development of animation wok on the *Bangsawan Puteri Saadong*, an evaluation on the animation story will be conducted. The evaluation is to serve for two purposes; first is to see viewers' acceptance towards the animation which presents the story in *Bangsawan* style and second is to see how the story of *Puteri Saadong* as presented in the new version and form will improve viewers/ readers understanding compared to the original text which uses dialect and classic Malay language. The evaluation will be carried out in a study involving varsity students who are majoring in Malay Literature.

## Conclusion

Presenting old traditions in new forms through various choices of media and technology has opened up new possibilities of acceptance towards long-forgotten cultural and traditional heritage. More can still be done with what was previously practiced by people before technology era came into existence by utilizing the state of the art technologies in presentation. This research is conducted by doing an adaptation of an old story from Malay literature and presenting it in a visual form complete with Malay elements in performing arts. *Bangsawan* style of performance is chosen to be the mode of presentation for developing *Puteri Saadong* story in 2D format in this research.

*Bangsawan* is an art of Malay tradictional performance which enables a story to be delivered in various styles such as acting, singing and dancing. Through the advancement of technology, *bangsawan* could be enjoyed both through live performance and recorded version via television as well as on the Internet. To make it more appealing not just for the adults, a *bangsawan* story could be conveyed in a more dynamic and creative form. This is what we plan to achieve by developing a *bangsawan* story in the format of 2D animation. The animation project for this research is still a work in progress. To date, the animation is still in the production phase whereas the script and storyboard had been finalized.

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