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## Transforming Sang Kancil Folktale Into Visual Art With Autoethnography

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***Abstract.** This practice-based research has produced visual art, particularly drawings based on significant animal folktale observations. Folktales symbolize human behavior and culture. Malays use folktales to educate, advise, and satirize. The study covers Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka's (2015) traditional literary script, *Sang Kancil Membilang Buaya*. Chang (2008) autoethnography guided artwork development. Visual artists preserved folktales by adding aesthetic appeal and fresh knowledge to Sang Kancil tales. The transmission mechanism provided value by showing visual art with digital presentations without changing the story. This research analyses textual and visual data on *Sang Kancil Membilang Buaya* through artworks to increase cultural knowledge and awareness of oral tradition and participation among society, in accordance with UNESCO's goals to preserve the intangible heritage.*

***Keywords:** Autoethnography, Folktale, Sang Kancil*

### INTRODUCTION

Through autoethnography, this study aims to produce visual artworks based on the stories of *Kumpulan Cerita Sang Kancil* published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. It focuses on animal-related stories or *cerita binatang* that are common in folk literature. Every nation in the world has animal tales, and the Malays are no exception. As a satirical and functional criticism of society, the roles portrayed by various characters and animal characters with varying degrees of intelligence who can speak, think, and have human-like characteristics are a functional and satirical analogy. In Malaysia and Indonesia, the tale of the mousedeer, or *Sang Kancil*, is one of the most popular animal tales.

A review of visual art exhibitions has been conducted by the researcher. It is a data compilation of artworks exhibited at the Open Show, Shah Alam Gallery, Malaysia, between 2000 and 2022. The findings of the review show that in twenty-two years, a total of 2771 artworks were selected for exhibitions. Only a total of 39 artworks are based on folklore themes. Bascom (1965) separated folklore into myth, legend, and folktale. The proprietors of a myth believe it happened and hold it sacred. Gods or demigods represent myths. Occurrences happen in another universe or in the past. Legends are folk narratives like myths, which are believed to have happened but are not sacrosanct, but they are man-made, sometimes extraordinary, and often aided by magical entities. It happened in our world, not long ago. Folktales are unbound by time and space and do not happen. Data acquired from the review of exhibitions found that out of thirty-nine exhibited artworks with a folklore theme, twenty-seven came with sub-genre myth, and only nine used legends as with sub-genre. Whereby, the sub-genre folktale is less preferred by artists to work with. There were only three artworks from the folktale. In addition to generating works with a folktale theme, this research can contribute to re-storying folktales, particularly *Sang Kancil*, through the visual arts by artists.

Folktales, like mythology and other types of oral literature, can be considered living organisms. It develops and evolves. It can be altered to delight a certain audience and reformed to meet the teller's aim. However, unlike other kinds of oral literature, folktale does not always perish when the story reaches the paper (Christina A. M., 2023).

## **BACKGROUND RESEARCH**

Culture is a recognized, acknowledged, and evolving way of life that has differentiated social groups in society over time. Through culture, communication within social organizations transfers meaning. Since the dawn of human history, it has been acknowledged that culture unites and differentiates social groups. The world is geographically divided, and people from different continents and countries have distinct cultures. Taylor (1965) explains that culture is also a historical pattern of symbolic meanings that individuals use to communicate, retain, and develop their knowledge and attitudes toward life. Folklore, folktales, and oral tradition play an essential role in every culture. Both are transmitted orally from generation to generation as an alternative means of communicating morality, creativity, motivation, and representation, which must still be embedded in art. For future generations, we must preserve and protect our cultural heritage.

Because heritage reflects the identity of a community, it must be preserved. In addition to tangible cultural heritage, intangible cultural heritage is a crucial domain that must be preserved. Digital preservation is one method for protecting this valuable heritage in the digital era. However, the absence of digital preservation of intangible cultural heritage necessitates increased efforts to prevent its extinction (Wan Malini W. I., Nor Azan M. Z., Fadhilah R., and Hafiz M. S., 2018).

In 2003, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) endorsed the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage Conference, which was adopted by 130 countries, including Malaysia. This conference has identified five significant cultural components. Intangible heritage consists of oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, cultural practices, knowledge and practices highlighting the significance of natural and universal values, and craft/handicraft skills. Malaysia is rich in the intangible cultural heritage of multiple ethnicities. Loss and extinction of intangible cultural assets are the consequence of changing times and neglect (Yusuf, 2016). The 2016 National Heritage Act defines intangible cultural heritage as "an act or movement of people that can be seen, touched, tasted, smelt, or heard when it is performed or exists, but cannot be appreciated when it is lost or gone." In other words, intangible cultural heritage refers to something that cannot be seen or touched but can be experienced.

The National Heritage Act of 2005 also explained that intangible cultural heritage is comparable to a form of expression, language, utterances, sayings, songs produced by music, note, lyrics that can be heard, singing, folk songs, oral traditions, poetry, dance, acting, and others that are produced by the performing arts. In addition, the performance of theatre, the arrangement of sound and music, and the practice of martial arts are all elements of Malaysia's cultural heritage. In contrast, Sulaiman (2011) defines oral tradition, culture, and customs as messages or culture, and oral customs as messages or pieces of advice handed down from one generation to the next.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Oral tradition, specifically Malay Folktale, must be given a new lease on life in the context of Fine Art or visual art, which necessitates a more modern and trend-driven approach. Not only can techniques be utilized through newly developed concepts, but they can also be conveyed in a more digital and communicative approach. Communities, researchers, and institutions may also utilize information technology to preserve the diversity and richness of oral traditions, including textual variants and various performance styles. Unique expressive characteristics, such as intonation and a greater variety of varying styles, can now be captured as audio or video, as can interactions between performers and audiences and nonverbal narrative elements, such as mimicry and gestures.

This study will focus on Malay folktales, specifically the animal characters that appear in *Sang Kancil*. Every stanza of traditional classical stories is filled with advisory messages, hints, and lessons. Hamzah asserts (2019: 5);

*‘Dunia cerita dongeng didominasi oleh makhluk serta karakter yang luar biasa dan tidak bertapak di alam logika. Kebiasaannya cerita dongeng mampu mempersonakan pendengar kerana ia bersifat fantasi, dipenuhi dengan elemen fiksi yang tidak mengikut hukum alam. Moral serta pengajaran menjadi topik utama dalam sastera ini’.*

According to Nordiana A.J. (2020), contemporary society makes comprehending and appreciating folktale texts challenging. Folklore must be conveyed in a readily understandable format, which necessitates numerous initiatives and studies.

## **FOLKTALE**

A folktale is a story that involves a person or animal learning or performing a valuable lesson about obeying or disobeying cultural rules or taboos. A folktale exists in the shape of a story that carries meaningful messages and embeds a cultural identity. The tale is fabricated and altered by crowds of people across a timeline of different generations. It also brings a distinctive style that applies to present and future individuals and occurrences (Lwin, 2009). In Asian countries, the presentation of folktales is performed from one place to another by a storyteller known as *Tok Dalang*, *Tukang Karut*, *Tukang Canang*, and many more. Along with the performance, there will be dance, traditional instruments presentation, and martial arts performance (Fytullah Hamzah, 2020).

According to Lhueze (2015), folktales, myths, beliefs, and legends need to be safeguarded in this digital age to avoid extinction due to globalization and commercial entertainment. Life's rich values and lessons remain relevant in providing examples and guidance to the younger generations and should be continued and preserved. Folktales according to (Fong, 2013) can be divided into four categories which include tales of origin, folk epics, comic tales, and tales about animals. Tales of origin (cerita asal usul) or the etiological tale is the oldest from folklore. The stories can be myths or facts and are considered real by their narrators. Folk epic described by Winstedt R.O., (1939) as a folk romance. Malays call such stories *Cerita Penglipur Lara* which means 'tales to comfort your woes'. Comic tales or *cerita jenaka* are stories that are full of humour and considered something that evokes laughter, hilarity, mirth, and funny.

### **1. Sang Kancil**

*Sang Kancil* is the main character of animal narratives in Malay folklore. Typically, there are three (3) stages of development. In the first level, *Sang Kancil* is depicted as a small animal whose existence is threatened by constant danger. *Sang Kancil* can endure due to his exceptional intelligence. At level two, *Sang Kancil* has become the jungle's Chief Magistrate and King Solomon's minister. His responsibility is to arbitrate all conflicts between humans and animals. At level three, *Sang Kancil* becomes the King of the Jungle and can discipline all disobedient animals. The *Hikayat Pelanduk Jenaka* type describes this level. According to Nadiatul Shakinah A. R.,(2018), the *Sang Kancil* is described as an animal that assists other animals with tricks and performs well in the, a clever animal who deceives other animals. Its intelligence allows it to defeat larger animals. A narrative of this nature could provide lessons in intelligence and judgment in strategic management to defeat opponents of great strength.

### **RESEARCH METHOD(S)**

The study employs relativism as its ontological methodology. The overview of two primary realities is constructed so that the significance and value of the research can be understood. Two disciplines are represented: visual art and literature. The artwork was produced in practice as a research method using autoethnography. It is based on my own experiences and observations of something (in the context of the empirical data study, it is a reference to the story's content, the anthropomorphic character, and the allegory of *Sang Kancil's story*).

In autoethnography, the researcher is provided with the opportunity to recover the marginalized and self-reflective space in the study by narrating his or her story through narrative research. Many discursive representations of lived experiences are included in the multilayered nature of the narrative research method. (Xu & Connelly, 2010; Craig, 2009; Fox, 2008; Clandinin, 2006). Autoethnography can be conducted with temporal consistency or retrospectively, with the researcher's decision to engage in autoethnography occurring after the described events (Lee, 2018), focusing on the researcher's experiences with an organization or institution to reflect on and expose culture and practices (Herrmann, 2017). The researcher referred to the triadic balance defined by Chang (2008) which consists of three components: reflection, analysis, and interpretation.

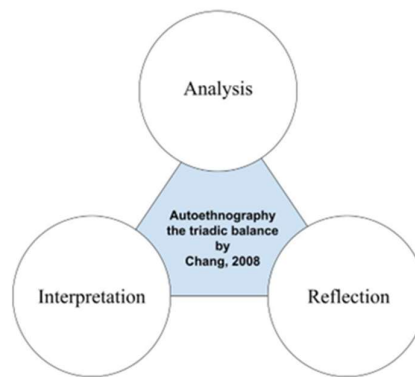


Chart 1: Chang's (2008) representation of the autoethnography method

## 1. Analysis

First, the analysis-based approach is justifiable as an observation of the story of *Sang Kancil Membilang Buaya*. First among the three components of the analysis of the work is the comprehension or observation of the narrative. The second component is the description of the anthropomorphic characters that play a role in the plot, and the third is the message conveyed. This method of analysis employs drawing as the bodywork that serves as the observation recorder to visualize the essence of the grandeur of Malay folktales. This series was exhibited as an online art exhibition to overview its reflection from the viewers. The drawings have been uploaded, and viewers can read and understand the story by clicking on each drawing. An online exhibition is one way to present folktales visually with digital presentation.



Figure 1: Series of *Sang Kancil Membilang Buaya*,  
Media: Pencil, charcoal on canvas, Size: 59cm x 46cm x 10pcs, Year: 2021

## 2. Interpretation

Secondly, the method of interpretation is based on my judgment of the story of *Sang Kancil*, and the meaning is expressed in terms of its own content and attributes. The researcher visualized the narrative and illustration from the script not in a straightforward manner, but as conveying different connotations. The remote was interpreted using the *Sang Kancil Membilang Buaya* tale. Underwater, two crocodiles dominate. One is bound around the body—hands, tail, legs, and head. In the narrative, Sang Buaya was tricked and obeyed all *Sang Kancil's* wishes. *Sang Kancil* controlled a group of crocodiles to cross the river safely and eat water apples till he was full. Through the Artvive application, the Remote can also be viewed in Augmented Reality (AR). The AR presentation was created with the smartphone program Artvive because it is a ubiquitous and user-friendly device.

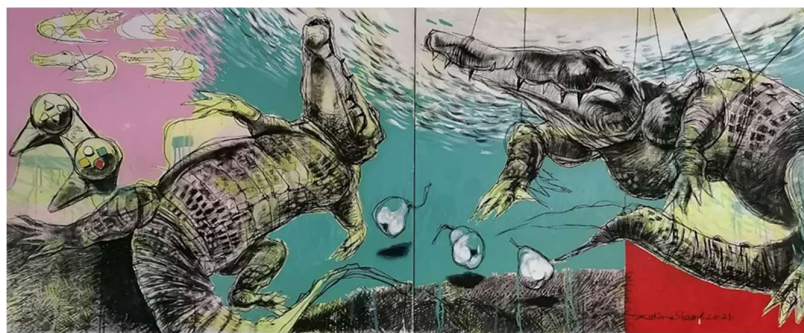


Figure 2: The Remote, Media: Charcoal & acrylic on canvas, Size: 228cm x 96cm, Year: 2021  
\*Download Artvive apps and scan this figure for augmented reality.

### 3. Reflection

The last method used is reflection, which is the description or translation of *Sang Kancil's* story by demonstrating the connotation of ideas that interact with situations or issues associated with the meaning of the story. The rationale for the translation of the literature is based on formalistic considerations of form and meaning. Still centered on the narrative of *Sang Kancil Membilang Buaya*, with *Sang Kancil's* deception and manipulation as the central theme of the translation. Power is represented by the image of a desk and chair at an office. Where having authority can cause someone to become more self-important without taking other people's needs into account. The sea bass is meant to represent the current controversial issue.



Figure 3: *Siakap, Buaya dan Sikap Manusia*, Media: Charcoal, acrylic on canvas,  
Size: 138cm x 100cm, Year: 2021

\*Download Artvive apps and scan this figure for augmented reality.

### CONCLUSION

The exploration of drawing practices in producing this visual art has resulted in the development of ideas and methods that add value to the works of contemporary art presentation. A comprehensive discussion through the ontology of the study has elevated the artworks that are also presented digitally as an instrument of re-storying *Sang Kancil* tales from the observation of personal experiences, surroundings, and societal and cultural issues. Through practice in the studio that is regulated by the developed methodology, this study contributes to the field of Fine Arts through the aspects of research development along with the progression of drawing practices. The study can attend as a reference for researchers conducting studies involving studios of professional practice. On average, folktales are preserved in the form of animation and story books, but in this research, digital and online presence has been implemented to serve as suggestions for *Sang Kancil* re-storying through visual arts.



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