

# RAISING INTEREST IN MALAY CLASSIC LITERATURE IN YOUNG READERS

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## Abstract

The interest in reading printed books has tapered off in this digital age as shown by reports of continual loss from many book publishers over the years. What to do to whet reading habits, especially among the young? What are the options in store in book publishing? What can publishing experts predict? What can we say how to whet reading habit? We know that without reader, more publishers will wind up their business. Thus, new ways and outlets have to search. Though Malay hikayat are considered important, they are not interesting. To make them interesting, relevant and acceptable to young readers, publishers must recognize the twin purposes of instruction and delight that have long been accepted as the primary goals of books for children and the fact that they are important and form a distinctive category of readers with separate needs and interests. Only by making the books interesting, relevant and acceptable to them, Malay hikayat can hope to live on. Though physically weak, they are spiritually, emotionally and imaginatively strong. Stories about animals, fantasy and legends are popular with them. They love the illustrated books, cartoons, comics, movies and others on Pak Pandir, Pak Belalang, Singapura Dilanggar Todak, Puteri Gunung Ledang, Hang Tuah dan Hang Jebat. These stories are also among the finest examples of moral tales that encourage them to focus on self-improvement like Aesop fables, stories from Grimm's brothers. This means that integration of visual and verbal elements has remained a significant feature to attract children. In this paper, we argue that publishers must adapt stories from Malay classical literature to illustrated books, movies, comics, movies, films and e-books. Linking the best visual and verbal elements in these publications is the way forward to teach literacy, history and moral to young readers.

## Reading Habit is Tapering off in Printed Media

All good stories have time tested plots like justice triumphing over tyranny and the good defeats the bad, among many of the aspects of life that have not changed. But, as it is, printed Malay classic literature is far removed from the everyday life of children who tend to imagine themselves superheroes as in the Malay hikayat. They just slam the books and walk away. On the other hand, they movies, illustrations, cartoons and comics that allow them to live out their dream every time. In this paper, we argue that adapting Malay hikayat to illustrations, comics and movies are building the necessary bridges to effectively introduce Malay classic literature to young readers. Attracting them will help them build the foundation for literature.

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The key issue here is making the connection. With the interest aroused, young readers, especially children, can begin to grasp and identify the archetypal images and patterns that appear in Malay hikayat in new forms and lights in this ever changing environment. It is also in this way that Malay classic literature can be revived for new audience and more importantly made available for discovery by a new generation. Many of the interesting stories in *Penglipor Lara*, *Cerita Jenaka*, *Sejarah Melayu*, *Hikayat Hang Tuah* and others as published by Yayasan Karyawan Agung in Malaysia can be read again and again by all age groups of readers. Other favorite stories like Pak Pandir, Lebai Malang, Si Luncai, Puteri Gunung Ledang and Singapura Dilanggar Todak are what we need when we feel depressed and tired, when everything works out not right. There is plenty of love and advice in them. We may even retire to bed with nice and warm feeling that the world is not a bad place after reading them. There is such a wide range of stories and topics and subjects to choose every day and every night in the Malay classic literature. But, the existing printed Malay classic literature books are not interesting to children. For them, the stories should be made enjoyable with a mixture of picture, color, voice and motion. We need adaptation not only to help to make these classic stories interesting to children, but also bring back the favourite stories not available in print-in-demand option. This would make them to live on.

No matter how much praise has been heaped on Malay classic literature published by Karyawan Agung, for instance, an unread book is only collecting dust on bookshelf. The magic can only begin when a child or grown-up reader is ready to read it. But, children and young readers will start with beautifully illustrated books. So, one way to make them interested in these books is through pictures and illustrations. This is the way children like flipping through books and magazines they cannot read as yet because of photos, illustrations and advertisements. This is a form of reading for kids and how they start to read, and parents should respect it. On this, Kiefer (2010) and Ray (1991) argue that good picture story books are the first books that not only make children fall in love with reading, but also turn them into lifetime readers. Lifetime readers become lifetime learners. The first picture book that children read is therefore an excellent way for them to learn. It is here that children pick up vocabulary, imagery, rhythm, shape, structure, conciseness, emotional power and more. In other words, picture is the most flexible of all literary and literacy formats. We can do almost anything with illustrations and pictures. This flexibility also encourages creativity and broadens children mind, and subsequently enriches their imagination. So, picture books have a big job: be able to charm and entice a child into hunger for more, more, more books as he or she grows! They are, after all, the first books a human being experiences in what, it is hoped, will be a lifetime of reading. More benefits of picture in encouraging reading will be discussed.

From my own experience with my children in the past and grand-children now, I believe that one effective way to attract children and younger readers to read, more attention need to be given to visual and even audio-visual effects (Ding 1995

& 2004) because of the multiple benefits of new multi-media. Please remember that what make a book interesting to children is not just pictures, illustrations, colors and motion, but combination of all of them. Beautiful illustrations alone cannot and will never make a story interesting. An interesting story book is one where words and pictures are married perfectly. It is this perfect match of words and pictures together with a strong central character that will make an illustrated book memorable and rise above all the others. This makes the *Jungle Book*, *Snow White* and *Cinderella* in Disney cartoon so popular with children all over the world.

In this paper, I would argue that adaptation to colourful illustrations, picture books, comics and movies is the way to move forward. This is also because through comics and movies, children and young readers will find themselves captivated with ideas of new possibility of moving into another world, the way the virtual world they have in front of computer. In the past, old folks enjoyed listening to stories with characters who could fly and travel in space and time and made their dreams achievable. In other words, to make Malay classic literature more interesting and relevant to children and young readers, publishers have to think about what really is possible and do what can really be done. Remember, good stories in Malay classic literature have the broadest possible age range of audience. There are the Malay pantun, syair (*Syair Ken Tambuhan*), adventure (*Hikayat Hang Tuah*, *Hikayat Abdullah*), romance (*Hikayat Panji Jayeng Kusuma*, *Serat Cathini*), language (*Katibin*), interaction (*Hikayat Merong Mahwangsa*), funny and sarcastic (*Penglipura lara*), law (*Undang-Undang Melaka*), love and more. They all have something important to say, to give, to all ages of audience. They are not just books for adults, but young children too. They can be made more interesting and relevant across different age groups by adding illustrations, colors, motions and others to allow readers of all ages to enjoy.

This new approach is also based on the awareness that the elements of fantasy and reality therein can be adapted from mere print medium to more visual world. Stories in Malay classic literature are mostly fictional and imaginative. It is amazing when we think of great influences they had on Malay people in the past. They loved them. This shows their power, wonder and relevancy to the people. But, now, children and young readers are not interested in them. Thinking that old Malay folks in preliterate feudal society also could not read, but they were entertained by *Tukang Cerita*, what lesson can we learn from the Malay people in the past? Can Malay classic literature be made made interesting through other media, including adaptation? Is it not true that young readers would want more visual and even audio elements, instead of printed texts only?

### **The Importance and Benefits of Adaptation**

On 12 June, 2014, *New Straits Times (Malaysia)* carries an exciting news that Media Prima and Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka plan to adapt Malay novels for movies. This would put more weight to our argument that comics and illustrations are more efficient to captivate young readers. Stories in Malay classic literature are still relevant, but not interesting in printed form and without illustrations. Adaptation

in his paper is transforming stories from printed media to be either more visual-based, or audio-visual-based and also with other multimedia effects added. To do it would require new imagination, creativity, skill, professionalism, technology and others (Cartmell et al 2007). But, frankly it is impossible and unnecessary to adapt everything in the printed books not only because of limitations, but also the difference between the different media. But, one thing is sure: it is more visual than literary. Adaptation is done on the belief that audience would usually perceive and process the written word different from how they perceive and process visual images. The shift to be more visual-based or picture-oriented books had taken place in the mid-19th century when paper and printing became widely available and affordable with the rising of disposable income and the improved literacy rates. Among some good examples are *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll (1865), *The Hobbit* by J. R. R. Tolkien (1937) and the *Best of Jules Verne: 3 Complete, Illustrated Novels*. They are among the most recognizable stories in adult fantasy fiction. For children the great successful stories are *Snow White*, *Tintin* and *Winnie the Poole*. Pictures and illustrations have always adorned children's stories as they play a great role in books intended for them (especially pre-literate children). Even after children capable to read to enjoy a story without illustrations, they continue to appreciate the occasional drawings. A good illustrated book is one where the pictures can enhance or add value to the text. This means that visualization can help to extend the meaning of text beyond literal understanding, thus help to whet young readers' interest in reading.

Before moving on with the topic, let us reiterate the importance of pictures and illustrations in encouraging love for story, book and reading. First of all, visual intelligence is an important skill as all of us are surrounded and inundated by visual images. We must also not forget that pictures and illustrations appeal to more learning eyes than any other format. Teachers from kindergarten to university have recognized the value of using pictures in teaching because it is pictures that catch our attention first. Similarly, if we want to express a powerful message, using a picture is the most powerful way to do so. Good pictures create playing fields where we can explore and experiment the relationships between words and pictures. Picture and text go hand in hand, like inseparable lovers. They can enhance the text, and not that competes with or obliterates the other. This means that adult readers still need pictures. As we grow, our reading materials come with fewer pictures. Many adult readers would recall that the combination of words and pictures are essential in reading and understanding texts. This is because a good picture worths a thousand words, thus the best in teaching and learning. Pictures is visual language that help to develop children visual intelligence. Thus, publishers need to consider including more illustrations in classic literature to make them enjoyable to young readers. Illustrations and adaptation are needed to open the door for children to be interested in reading Malay classic literature. Otherwise the door is closed and when their interest decline, they become reluctant readers.

One of the reasons Malay historical fictions are not interesting to young

readers now is that they find it difficult to visualize and imagine on their own the historic events that took place long time ago, despite the fact there are many interesting episodes comparable to stories from Grimm's brothers, Aesop fables and Disney cartoons. Here we need the adaptations the way that make *Jungle Book* (1895), *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), and *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926) so successful among children. The keywords here are interesting and enjoyable. It began with Lewis Carroll's fantasy *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* that was published in 1865 in England. This signalled a change in writing style for children to an imaginative and empathetic one. Regarded as the first English masterpiece written for children and as a founding book in the development of fantasy literature, its publication opened the First Golden Age of children literature in Britain and Europe that continued until the early 1900s. Following that, the adventure stories of *Treasure Island*, and *Kidnapped*, both by Robert Louis Stevenson, came into the picture in the 1880s alongside the Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* first published in 1894. Now, we have an explosion of children literature in the West both in terms of quantity and quality. Turning to Malay classic literature, my favourite is *Hikayat hang Tuah* by Nor Suraya (2012). I am impressed by her vigorous effort in condensing and focusing on essentials and removing the boring repetition in original work. This is also the formula that remains the essence of adaptation in Reader's Digest, the world's most widely read magazine today. It is currently published in 49 editions and 21 languages and is available in over 70 countries every month, including bahasa Indonesia edition starting in 2004. They contribute articles of enduring significance in condensed permanent booklet form. Though I am many years past reading picture books, I still have a strong interest with books laced with attractive pictures and vivid art work. Recently I read the above-mentioned *Hikayat Hang Tuah* in less than three days, and find it difficult to finish reading the version of *Hikayat Hang Tuah* by Kassim Ahmad (1997).

One need not argue the importance of illustrated novels for adults. They are so many examples of books for children are suitable for adults, including *The Swiss Family Robinson* (1812), *Oliver Twist* (1838), *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844), *Great Expectations* (1860), *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), *Kidnapped* (1886) and *Moonfleet* (1898). They are enjoyed by million of adults today. Here, it is important to mention too that all the four classics in Chinese literature - Lou Guang-zhong's 14th century *Romance of the Three Kingdom*, Shi Nai-an's 14th century *Water Margin*, Wu Ceng-en's 16th century *Journey to the West*, and Cao Xueqin's 18th century *Dream of the Red Chamber* - remain popular as ever partly also because of various adaptations. They have many versions to appeal to different levels of age groups. The versions for young children are written in simple language, use larger print, and have many illustrations, while that for older children use increasingly complex language, normal print, and fewer illustrations. An important clue from these examples for Malay classic literature is that it would have to be republished in different categories with different age groups in mind. For example, (1) Stories with more pictures for children aged 0-5' (2) early reader books for children aged 5-7; (3) Chapter books for children aged 7-12 and (4) Young adult fictions for

children aged 12–18. These different versions are designed to help children build their reading skills.

As mentioned earlier, to adapt printed literary work to be a good young story book, we have to remember that it should be a perfect combination of simple, lively art work and memorable text. As it is, repetition of words and scenes in many of the Malay classic literary works are boring, flat, confusing and long-winded to general public. But, repetition is exactly what a children story book needs. Looking around, a story book for the very young have words and pictures that can grab their eyes to offer comfort and to spark interest and create a sense of adventure. Here the Issues that surface in childhood that may continue years later are none other than separation, loss, reunion, dependence, independence, security, insecurity, jealousy, envy, rivalry, gratification, among many others. They would have the most powerful effects on both children and adults, though a child's experiences are different from a 20-year-old's, and a 30-year-old's are different again from a 40-year-old's.

We argue that visual and even audio-visual elements can whet the interest of children and young readers. Juxtaposing pictures and texts not only can tell a story better, but also the possibilities that children comprehension and enjoyment can be expanded. When adults are not around to help, pictures can help children build vocabulary by looking at the pictures or illustrations. This means that understanding becomes easier because the pictures have provided the clues. In this way, pictures encourage joy in reading. It is in this way illustrated story books have turned the traditional way of reading and make reading more relaxing and fit the tempo of modern lives. Moving one step further, many episodes like the duel between Hang Jebat and Hang Tuah, Singapura Dilanggar Todak, the magical Keris Taming Sari that can fly out of its sheath to attack the enemy, the romance in *Hikayat Panji Jayeng Kesuma* and others, can be appreciated better with illustrations. This means pictures can stimulate a state of mind in children that words alone cannot do (Cartmell et al 2005). It is also in this way that pictures give young readers a sense of control and help them build self-confidence. As it is, many stories in printed Malay classic literature are unthinkable without illustrations which can be regarded not only as an outlet but also a way forward to make existing stories to live on.

Few would disagree that increased literacy means a bigger thirst and desire to read, and reading opens up a treasure trove of ideas, stories and information in all forms, including literature. As it is, children and young readers in general find reading printed texts boring. Thus, we argue that illustrations, cartoons, comics and movies are some of the terrific tools to combat this dilemma. I know this from personal experience with my grand children, aged 4 to 12. They do not like the printed *Lady Bird* and *Tintin* series which their parents loved years ago. Instead they cling to e-books and I-pad which did not exist 20 years ago. Looking back, I remember my mother sparked my interest and whetted my reading appetite at the age of 6 or 7 by giving me comics. I vividly recall constantly running to her asking for help with words I did not understand. This hunger to read and learn never left me until today. Indeed, most of the people I know who have been reading comics

since childhood relate similar stories and experience. In short, illustrations, pictures and comics are fun and more importantly kids can relate reading to fun. By reading something that is considered fun and enjoyable, parents can instill a positive allure to reading.

Johan Jaafar (2014) believes too that it is necessary to adapt many local novels into movies. This means also that it is necessary to have multiapproach to literature. He adds that Malay films during the golden era were harping on works of literature by citing *Hang Tuah*, directed by Phani Majumdar in 1956, was based on a popular legend in *Sejarah Melayu* and Hussein Haniff's *Hang Jebat* (1961) made a hero out of Hang Jebat, the rebel with a cause. Likewise, Hollywood has adapted some of the difficult, tough and not easy to read literature like *Don Quixote*, *Moby Dick*, *Ulysses*, *Brothers Karamazov*, *Dr Zhivago*, *The Name of the Rose*, *War and Peace* and *The Lord of the Rings*, to enthral millions of moviegoers the world over.

Can we adapt Malay classic literature into movies, films, and book with more illustrations to attract young readers? It is certainly possible as they have the elements of great stories. But, we should not expect a novel to be a ready-made product for film, for instance, because the literary medium is entirely different from the film, besides other technical and legal problems. Here, we are dealing with metamorphosis of printed fiction to be visual, for instance the movies. Johan quotes Bluestone who argues in his book *Novels into Film* (1967) that changes are inevitable the moment one abandons the linguistic for visual medium. The success of *The Lord of the Rings* sends another clear message to film makers that novels, however impenetrable, are adaptable. Jaafar (2014) cites many examples from Hollywood that has always been enamoured with novels since the early days of films. Of the 5,907 movies produced by Hollywood between 1935 and 1945, 976 of them, or 17 per cent, are based on novels. Incidentally, many Malay films, including *Si Tanggang*, *Batu Belah Batu Bertangkup*, *Badang*, *Nujum Pak Belalang*, *Musang Berjanggut* and *Anak Buluh Betung*, were based on Malay oral traditions. Some of the best remembered movies were based on works of literature here and elsewhere.

Our problem is not the technology, nor the story making, but the necessary adaptation which involves vigorous effort in condensing and focusing on essentials and adding the necessary illustrations, for example. As it is, Malay classic literature has a wide array of themes which can appeal to a wide variety of readers. We have stories on benevolence, justice, individualism, loyalty, courage, righteousness, truthfulness, grace, favour, mutual dependence, desire for glory, vengeance, revenge, forgiveness, compassion, identity, sexuality, science fiction, friendship, love, conflict, relationships to authority, peer pressure, separation, loss, reunion, dependence, independence, insecurity, jealousy, envy, rivalry, security and more. These stories can be far more enduring and appealing not only to adults but also young readers through vigorous condensing and focusing on essentials. This is also a formula that remains the essence of adaptation in *The Reader's Digest*. They could also be recreated in many ways in illustrations, comics, cartoons and even

films to whet the interest of young readers like those that have been successfully done in Disney in the West and many *wuxia* tales in China. They are successful also because of the imaginative use of vivid colours and breath-taking background settings blended with elements of mythology and fantasy (Kiefer 2010).

We, readers of all age groups, like to read them to able to relate to them and to allow them to identify with a particular character to create a sense of security when experiencing something that is going on within our lives. Reading them may help us validate our own experience. Only being able to attract young readers can the old stories continue to live on. But our young readers are not interested in Malay classic literature featuring young protagonists who experience many tragedies, and go on to undertake numerous trials and tribulations. Throughout their adventures, they pick up several forms of martial arts from various well-known master fighters. At the end, the protagonists emerge as powerful fighters whom few can equal. These plots and patterns of stories are common too in the great historical fictions in the West, *wuxia* tales in China and elsewhere. In these stories, the tragic events that almost cost the lives of the heros and set the events into motion and culminate in the victory of the heroes in the end. It is here that there is a dire need to have more graphic and visual effects to add new value to *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, *Sejarah Melayu* and *Hikayat Merong Mahawnagsa* to capture the young readers' market which is big. It is here we can draw inspiration from the West and *wuxia* tales. We have other historical fictions in Malay literature, including ***Hikayat Aceh*** (Teuku Iskandar Teuku Ali Basyah, 2001) on Sultan Iskandar Muda Aceh (1606-1636) and ***Hikayat Raja Pasai*** (Russel Jones, 1999) on Malikul Salih in Pasai in the 13rd century), alongside the so-called epic in Malay literature, like *Hikayat Pocut Muhama* (Noriah Taslim & Nurainy Ali, 2011), besides the others like *Hikayat Teungku di Meuke*, *Hikayat Malim Dagang* and *Hikayat Meukuta Alam*. They are not selling well.

One way out of the commercial challenge is adaptation. This has been done the in West and China. The settings in Western and Chinese historical fictions are the same as in Malay classic literature: drawn from history, and often contain historical figures. Work in this genre, be it in the West or China or the Malay world, often portrays the manners and social conditions of the people or time. Here, the historical fiction of *Hikayat Hang Tuah* presents Hang Tuah, his colleagues, rulers and other people with their events from the point of view of characters of the time period as depicted. In modern Malay literature, *Panglima Awang* by Harun Aminurrashid (1957) is considered as its modern counterpart. They are different from *Hikayat Abdullah* (2004), an autobiography of Abdullah Munsyi, born in Malacca and worked in Singapore. The former is more historical fiction, while the latter was writing about himself and his experience. One more example of the former is *Tuhfat al-Nafis* (Raja Ali Haji, 1998). We have also *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* (Siti Hawa Salleh, 1998) which is a collection of legendary tales on early Kedah, involving Raja Bersiung, Raja Buluh Betung, diplomatic relations between Kedah and Siam and the process of Islamization of Kedah. They have all the elements of good stories in the sense that they have all the essential ingredients of drama, suspense, intrigue,



happy or sad endings. They are great. Otherwise they have been forgotten a long time ago. They are so simple and yet so complex that not everyone can produce one, like the stories of **Pak Pandir, Si Luncai, Pak Belalang** and the classic Malay pantun (Harun Mat Piah, 2001). We are also not short of humorous and sarcastic stories in **Cerita Penglipur Lara** (Mohd Taib Osman, 2004) and **Cerita Jenaka Melayu** (Mohd Taib osman, 2007). They are complex works focusing on the lives of ordinary Malay people in the real world, different from **historical fiction** that look at some scenarios from some of the history's most pivotal turning points and present a completely different version, partly based on fact, but often based on imagation and legends. Originally *Cerita Seri Rama, Cerita Malim Dewa, Cerita Malim Deman, Cerita Anggun Cik Tunggal and Cerita Raja Muda* in **Cerita Lipur Lara** are collection of Malay folk oral tales narrated by Mir Hassan and Pawang Ana. They are as entertaining, didactive and sacastic as the stories of Sang Kancil, Pelanduk dengan Anak Memerang, Pak Kaduk, Lebai Malang, Pak Pandir, Pak Belalang, Si Luncai, Mat Jenin, Pelanduk Jenaka, Musang Berjanggut and Abu Nawas in **Cerita Jenaka Melayu**. It was from Pak Kaduk's tale came the famous verse "Menang Sorak Kampung Tergadai". From the traditional stories of **Pak Pandir, Si Luncai, Pak Kadok** and others came other cliché referring to clever trickery, conflict and hapleness among the poor Malay folks in the past.

There is no doubt that the generally short *Cerita Penglipur Lara* are relevant in our contemporary society as they contain all the characters we can identify with and care about and more importantly the conflicts that need to be resolved in the end. They are among the great stories with strong messages and moral lessons to enlighten readers. Look at the famous quotation "*Tak Melayu hilang di dunia*" attached to Hang Tuah in *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. Though no such quote is found anywhere in the original text, readers can get the message from the story and what Hang Tuah did all along. Similarly, *Sejarah Melayu* or *Sulalat al-Salatin* (Muhammad Hj Salleh, 1997) has others to offer. They include the story of Raja Suran, the social contract between Sang Sapurba and Demang Lebar Daun, the invasion of swordfish in *Singapore* and the incredible stories of Semerluki, Tun Perak, Tun Kudu, Sultan Alaudin Riayat Shah, Khoja Maimun, Sultan Mahmud and Puteri Gunung Ledang. One interesting episode in *Sejarah Melayu* is Raja Mandalier concocted the story that Bendahara Tun Mutahir was plotting to overthrow the sultan. Sultan Mahmud Shah thus ordered the execution of Tun Mutahir and his family, with the exception of Tun Fatimah and the little boy Tun Hamzah. The death of Tun Mutahir weakened the Malacca court and left Malacca without a capable leader to guide Malacca in the defence against the Portuguese attacks in the end.

Besides the pantun, we have a romantic tale of Panji tales involving romances, wars, separation and reunion of Panji heros and heroins, Raden Galuh Candera Kirana, Raden Inu Kerta Pati and Raden Inu Kerta Pati in Javanese cities in Kuripan, Daha, Gagelang, Singasari, Manjapahit (Majapahit) and Lasem in *Syaer Ken Tambuhan* (Noriah Mohamed, Mariyam Salim & Wahyunah Abd Gani, 2002). Another Panji tale is *Hikayat Panji Jayeng Kusuma* (Abdul Rahman Kaeh, 2007), a narrative poem,

blending the romantic and mythological elements. This story is as enjoyable as *Hikayat Inderaputra* (S. W. R. Mulyadi & Braginsky, 2007), another popular cerita lipur lara in Aceh, Jawa, Lombok, Bugis, Makasar, Cam and Mindanao. On Javanese people and culture, we have "ensiklopedia keilmuan Jawa" in *Serat Chenthini* (Noriah Mohamed, Ghazali Basri & Singgih Wibisono, 2013). Readers who are interested in Malay language and grammar will find *Bustan al-Katibin* (Raja Ali Haji, 2005) interesting. It is considered as the earliest book on Malay language from the Malay World, besides *Kitab Pengetahuan Bahasa* (Raja Ali Haji, 2010). Another important reference source on legal matters and laws in Malay feudal society is none other than *Undang-Undang Melaka & Undang-Undang Laut* (Liaw Yock Fang, 2003) which is claimed to be also the source of *Undang-undang Kedah*, *Undang-undang Pahang*, *Undang-undang Patani*, *Undang-undang Johor & Hukum Kanun Brunei*. Last but not least, the general impression of the Malay people being very artistic can be seen also in the collection of some 4,000 very romantic, enjoyable and memorable pantun in *Pantun Melayu: Bingkisan Permata* (Harun Mat Piah, 2001).

Sadly to say that these Malay classics are not attractive to our young readers. But, children in China know their four great classics. It is here that we have to look for successful examples not only from China with wuxia (武俠) tales, but also Japan with *samurai bushidō* traditions, England's knight chivalry traditions, and America's gunfight traditions. Bound by a code of chivalry that required the characters in the texts to right the wrongs, they fought for righteousness, removed oppressors, redressed wrongs and brought retribution, thus are interesting and appealing to children too. Incidentally, many episodes in *Hikayat Hang Tuah* can also be turned to *wuxia*, a sub-genre of the quasi-fantasy and martial arts literature in Chinese literature, after making the necessary adaptation by blending certain historical or fictional tales and figures in the past with specific and recognizable parallels popular, known and appealing to the contemporary young readers. There are. Among the episodes in *Hikayat Hang Tuah* that can be dramatized and condensed is Sang Winara who went with four of his students to the camp of Raja Melayu but were spotted by Hang Tuah. Sang Winara turned himself into a piece of wood, then a dog, while Hang Tuah turned himself into a tiger and then Sang Winara fled. Later on, Sang Winara entered the camp again as a firefly which Hang Tuah he knew was Sang Winara and he waited. Sang Winara then turned himself into a cat. Hang Tuah tried to stab the cat which ran away and turned into a tiger and fled. When Sang Winara entered the camp the third time, he was confronted by Hang Tuah. This time, he fell and his head was cut off with a parang by Hang Tuah. The four students took back their master's head to show it to Patih Gajah Mada. Another high light in *Hikayat Hang Tuah* is the magical keris of *Taming Sari*, named after the Majapahit warrior Taming Sari before Hang Tuah killed him. Hang Tuah seemed to believe in its magical power so much that when he could not initially defeat Taming Sari, he thought that it was the keris *Taming Sari* that made the Majapahit warrior invincible. So, Hang Tuah used other tactic to gain possession of it and managed to kill Taming Sari. It was same with the duel Hang Tuah had with Hang Jebat. Finding it difficult to kill Hang Jebat, Hang Tuah once again thought it was the keris

Taming *Sari* which made the difference. So, once again Hang Tuah had to snatch back *Taming Sari*, after which he defeated Hang Jebat. Another intriguing episode is the tale that one day Malacca sultan was having a boat ride near Singapore and his crown fell into the seawater. The officers were afraid to try to retrieve it because there were many fierce crocodiles in the water. But, Hang Tuah dived into the water and retrieved the crown. Then, a white crocodile attacked Hang Tuah and his keris fell off. Once again, the sultan's crown fell into the waters. This time Hang Tuah could not retrieve it. It was said that the loss of both the crown and the keris Taming Sari was a cause or ill-omen signalling the approaching end of Malacca Sultanate and Hang Tuah. Symbolically, keris is another prominent characteristic of Malay culture and way of life. Certainly the story of the keris can be dramatised as cultural identity of the Malay people. Unique, the double-edged dagger that represents yet another high level of Malay creativity had been used to complete the Malay attire. Walking around without keris was akin to walking around naked for a Malay man in the past. The most famous keris in Malay culture is the Taming Sari. It was very special in that if the owner, in this case Hang Tuah, was menaced or threatened, it would fly out of its sheath all by itself through the air and attacked the assailant. It was believed to be endowed with mystical powers. We also hear tales of keris rattling in its sheath to warn the owner of potential danger. We often hear the claims that one could destroy an enemy by simply thrusting a keris into the enemy's footprints. There are tales that keris could transfer the site of a blazing fire by just pointing the tip of the blade to an alternative site.

These stories and episodes are comparable to *kungfu* in *wuxia* tales in Chinese literature, or the Japanese samurai's bushido tradition, or the chivalry of medieval European knights and the gunfights of America's West. All these have many common aspects of martial art tradition. One way to attract young readers is through adaptation and dramatization of the tales. This would require creativity and imagination of our artists as demonstrated by the "original" authors who used to derive ideas and inspirations from either real events or fantasy. These fictional, fairy and folk tales are popular with children who are physically weak but emotionally strong. They like stories with magic, witchcraft and fantasy as can be proved by the popularity of tales from Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm brothers. These fairy tales had also become fashionable among adults. The same happened to the original teddy bear story that inspired A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926). In the story, the bear was given as a present to Christopher Robin Milne by his father and was immortalized in Milne's text, as well as other Ernest Shepard's illustrations and also the Disney's version of the *Beauty and the Beast* (1991).

It is also through adaptation and dramatization that mythology, a genre of fiction consisting of stories that are set in another world in which one or more historical events unfolded differently than it did in reality. This can be variously seen as a subgenre of literary fiction. Since the 1950s, this type of fiction has to a large extent merged with science fiction involving cross-time and space travel, or voyaging uptime (into the past) or downtime (into the future) that results in

history splitting into two or more time-lines. Cross-time, time-splitting, and alternate history themes have become so closely interwoven that it is impossible to discuss them fully apart from one another (Cartmell et al 2005; Kiefer 2010 & Ray 1991). Certainly, the tales of *Singapura Dilanggar Todak*, *Puteri Gunung Ledang* and the *Demang Lebar Daun* declaration, to name a few, have riveting moral lessons on morality, conflict and humanities. They are some of the best stories which are character-driven and these characters drive the plot. Here we see the characters, the heroes/heroines, and the antagonists --the bad guys with flaws and weaknesses that get in the way, impeding their attempts to get what they want. It is these strong characters struggling to resolve layers of conflicts. It is here that lies the messages that move the stories that become interesting and exciting. It is their adaptations and dramatization by famed artists, illustrators and editors who have brought the Grimm brothers and Anderson's stories to the heart of children all over the world. It is only natural that we hope our local artists, illustrators and editors can also make the difference in visualizing and dramatizing stories in Malay classic literature.

Certainly the tales of *Puteri Gunung Ledang*, *Pak Pandir*, and *Tak Melayu hilang di dunia* have all the apparent and strong conflicts that give these stories their drive. It is conflict of the main characters that stir emotions in millions of audience. Adapted to illustrations, movies and comics, these conflicts can not only be more interesting and exciting visually, but also that these visual images that make them more inspiring, exciting, intriguing and memorable. Remember good story thrives on movement that can be better expressed through stimulating visual elements. This is also what children need. Failing that, they cannot make a good choice, a favourite. Adapting a story to illustration is all about bringing to life the best parts of the book. Mentioned already the intriguing quote "*Tak Melayu Hilang di Dunia*" in *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. These words reflect and inspire the inner strength and purity of the Malay race. Already 500 years passed since the slogan was uttered, it remains a motivational basis for the strength of the Malay people until today. This means also that this slogan has an inherent strength which embraces all aspects of the life of the Malay people from the viewpoint of politics, economy, religion, social, culture, education and international relations (Ong 2004). In their first attempt to conquer Malacca, the Portuguese were defeated by the Malay silat. Malacca only fell after the betrayal by Raja Mandaliar in 1511.

It is no wonder that Johan Jaafar (2014) and Azhari Mahmood (2014) laud the collaborate effort to adapt literature works into television drama and movies. They believe too that such moves would in no small part boost interest and sales of works of Malay literature. This collaborative effort is timely looking at the surge of interest among television audience, who enjoys drama and movie serials that are adapted from books and novels. Again, the popularity of movies, films, video game and illustrations is because of visual images that can stimulate our perceptions directly, while written words can only do this indirectly. This is partly due to the fact that illustration is a more sensory experience than reading (Kiefer 2010). Besides the visual language, there is also color, motion and sound involved in movies. Because

films and movies have limitations, thus film editors and directors must compress stories into two hours or so. On the other hand, there is no time constraint on a printed novel. But again, the meaning of a novel is controlled by only one person -- the author -- while the meaning we get from a movie/ film is the result of a collaborative effort by a pool of people with different talent and ability. Film also does not allow us the same freedom a novel does to interact with the plot or characters by imagining them in our minds. For some viewers, this is often the most frustrating aspect of turning a novel into a film. But, with the growing interest in illustrations, we need to have more Malay classic literature with illustrations. This is certainly true with illustrations, pictures, comics and movies. There is no problem in adapting Malay classic literature to be more visual as we have a string of artists. They include Amiruddin Ariffin (visual artist & painter), Jega Ramancahndram (painter & sculptor), Andie Tong (comic book artist), Billy Tan (comic book artist), and, Mohd Nor Khalid or Lat (cartoonist). We hope that they can bring tough and difficult Malay classic literature to the attention of young readers by making use of their magic of inspiration and imagination.

Now, publication media are changing with print changing to digital. As part of business, publishers have to adopt this new publication model to enable them to capture the new market emerging from *e-books* with young readers who can significantly reshape the way information is being generated and absorbed.

More importantly, some of the crafty expressions that would be a pleasure to read in print can be expressed better visually through digital technology that has the power of speed and multimedia presentation. As the printed texts do not have the effect of digital media, publishers have to use video and image as new engaging tools to hook the readers, and provide a complete audio-visual experience. In other words, publishers have also to think of adapting digital media given the fact that digital-content today is not only consumed on the computer, but across multiple platforms. Anyway, many publishers and writers want their books and stories shared digitally in computer, internet, I-pad, television and more.

We also suggest that more Malay classic literature be made digital not only because of multi-media technology, but also to solve "out-of-print" problem in many ways, unthinkable before. With the option of print-on-demand, publishers are now able to eliminate warehouse costs by storing book files digitally and print a number of copies whenever there is a demand. This print-on-demand also offers is also a new option to bring books that have been out of print for decades back into circulation and for new readers. It is also through this initiative print on demand, more books are made available to readers now than ever before. More importantly is the fact that closing down a print edition while keeping the title "alive" in digital form is certainly another new option available in our hands to preserve classic works to live on. Putting aside the print-versus-digital publication debate, it is clear that both media of publication have their own strengths and weaknesses. The deciding factor has to be the readership and the fact that digital medium is also amazingly for the pleasure of young readers and children. Thus, e-book is the new

and popular choice for children and young readers.

### **Adaptation is a Way To Move Forward**

In the paper, we argue that publisher should consider how pictures and words can work together to tell a story better to young readers. For decades now niche publishers in the West have been adapting children and adult story books to attract them not only that they love stories visually but also that the number of people who watch movies has greatly outnumbered those who read books. This is another good reason for writers to want to see their books adapted to films, cartoons and comics to suit the taste of “readers” who do not like reading. In other words, publishers have to provide option. Once a story becomes a choice, it has the potential to reach millions of readers who might not read books. Furthermore in this digital age, digital and e-books are dictating traditional publishers to catch-up. Not moving forward, they are only turning away young readers and no publisher can survive the loss of readers. Looking from another angle, before a printed book is about to draw its last breath of life, it is the digital, illustration, cartoon and movies that can give it new blood to support it to live on. This means that new media are now redefining a new life for Malay classic literature too. Saying that, a printed book that fail to attract young readers is not going to make it in the digital age. We have mentioned repeatedly already that the problem is not the story, but the medium. Because of changes in technology, many death signs can be seen now in traditional printing industry. Among the first signs are the readership reduction and the changing habits of readers. If publishers fail to connect the existing story with the potential readers now, no one can save them. Viewing the current trend of general lethargy towards printed books, many publishers have correspondingly cut their losses by not publishing classical literature in printed form. They prefer to let them die in peace. Another scenario is while stories cannot live solely in printed medium, there is absolutely more reason that they must be repackaged in other media. At the end of the day, it is the audience first.

As it is, book publishing industry is going through yet another revolution that not only enables readers to access more information now than before, but also gives them a new way to read. Here, convenience and seamlessness are the keywords that will push changes onto all parts of book publishing. This means that publishers have to look at what story they have on one hand and try to figure out how best to sell them on the other hand. There is a growing awareness that the existing Malay classic literature and other printed Malay hikayat are not as good as young readers would wish or hope. There will be increasingly choppy water for Malay classical literature publishers to look for better alternative to get out the chopper water. My arguments in this paper capitalize on the popular appeal for illustrations and new media of publication to introduce Malay classic literature to children. We argue that children begin to love reading by illustrations, colors motion and sounds. As explained, today’s young readers and children wouldn’t like to read any printed book without visual effects. Illustration is hence simply magical. Seeing the trend,

illustrated and e-books will enter publishing market in far greater number than before as their production costs plummet. Whether new digital products will find large enough pool of buyers at a reasonable price are some of the points publishers would like to consider. The crux is publishers have been challenged in many ways to continue to run viable business. If history is any indication, niche publishers including Simon & Schuster and Penguin, Random House, HarperCollins and Macmillan who have been making full use of e-book publishing will push e-book as a way forward.

Our arguments in this paper on the importance and benefits of adaptation are to make Malay classic literature more interesting, inviting, enjoyable and relevant to young readers. Is it not what we all crave when we want to read great works? It is not true that only enjoyable reading materials can whet our appetite for more? If so, it's not hard to imagine that the existing printed Malay literature can be made more interesting and be more involved with the society through adaptation. Interest in illustrated books and others using multimodality is growing due to the growing importance of multi-literacy. Hence, we need to look at illustrated books to see the attraction of fusion of image and word, a double vision of literacy. It is this fusion that can be hoped to bring Malay classic literature to more young readers. We have to make full use of new options available and exploit any better new media to make the necessary connection with young readers who are thirsty for story, knowledge and information. Children love illustrations and pictures that can potentially make them who were once reluctant readers get excited about reading. Illustrations can help the struggling elementary-school children able to read between the lines. In this way, it is pictures that build their confidence by enjoying looking at pictures. This visual language can provide lots of emotional cues (characters blush, sigh, etc.) to them. Thus, modern-day graphic novels are a well-respected and innovative genre.

Given the dynamic nature of the various new publishing media, publishers have to keep an eye on the needs of young readers from time to time. Seeing the shrinking market of printed media, and the expanding influence of television channels, along with seemingly limitless Web sites and other digital media, publishers need to accept the option and priority of audience as a way to move forward. With television stations, like BBC (UK), CCTV (China) and Media Prima (Malaysia) having extensive network of channels, books adapted to movies can undoubtedly reach a bigger audience. This move has a two pronged creative and proactive strategy in the sense that it would not only turn into a prosperous buyer of the said story book upon which it is based, but also that it would inculcate an interest in reading when the audience look for the original works. This would in turn boost the slow-paced book trade. These considerations are beneficial to both television stations and publishers. Such a move ought to be encouraged to ensure that great literary works published can reach a wider spectrum of people, who might not be keen readers of printed- books before.

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