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## **BUDI IN DIRECT CONFRONTATIONS PORTRAYED IN THE MALAYSIAN ANIMATION FILM *BOBOIBOY: THE MOVIE* (2016)**

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### **Abstract**

*BoBoiBoy: The Movie* (2016) screening in local cinemas has successfully attracted local reception partly due to its portrayal of Malaysian culture and moral values, which local audiences find relatable. Despite the film presenting a modern and futuristic world, values based on *Budi*'s traditional Malay concept are demonstrated throughout the main protagonist's actions. This paper employs the concept of *Budi* from the academic study of Lim Kim Hui and includes my attempt to argue that *Budi* is represented in direct confrontations portrayed by the main protagonist as a form of the deliverance of justice towards the evildoers. Additionally, I adopt Smith's "Structure of Sympathy" to discuss the spectator's engagement with the protagonist, which influences the spectator to agree with the actions taken. The concept of *Budi* suggests that traditional values are not lost in modern times, but it progresses and evolves to suit contemporary practices. *Boboiboy: The Movie* is one of the digital mediums that exhibits *Budi* as a traditional moral concept that can be sustained and disseminated particularly to younger generations, which comprises the majority of the audiences.

**Keywords:** *Budi*, Malaysian animation, moral values, sympathy

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### **Introduction**

In this paper, I will discuss how the complex concept of *Budi* has been demonstrated through the main protagonist's actions in directly confronting the antagonists in the selected 3D Malaysian

animation film, *BoBoiBoy: The Movie* (2016). The film was a commercial success and accumulated profits at the box office amounting to approximately RM16 million following forty days of screening (Hassan Muthalib, 2016)<sup>1</sup>. The positive reception indicates that the local spectator is able to emotionally extend emotions to the animated characters in the film. In my attempt to address this research perspective, I aim to explore the values of *Budi* as a primary motif, which shapes the Malay worldview and influences the local spectator's engagement with the protagonist, invoking a sympathetic relationship with the fictional character. Hence, I will begin my discussion with a brief illumination of Lim's (2003)<sup>2</sup> concept of *Budi* and Murray Smith's (1995)<sup>3</sup> concept of the Structure of Sympathy. Smith's tripartite structure is significant in explaining the spectator's engagement with fictional characters, particularly in the last stage where the character's actions are morally evaluated. Following this, I will briefly discuss the Malaysian animation industry to provide a general idea of the development of the local animation industry. Consequently, through my analysis of the animated film, I will attempt to argue that the spectator's engagement with the protagonist is via the acceptance of his direct confrontational actions and sympathetic engagement which is mainly induced by the inculcation of *Budi* as a moral compass. *Budi* is a foundational essence of the Malay moral values representing the dynamic and progressive Malay worldview.

### ***Budi* as the Malay Moral Compass**

*Budi* carries the meanings of wisdom, understanding or intellectual term and originated from the Sanskrit word *Buddhi*. Since ancient times, the Malays have believed in the fundamental concept of dualities such as good and bad which extends to their beliefs in humans consisting of the body and mind. The body is thought of as a physical component, which will eventually perish along with the human organs. In contrast, the "mind" which relates to the intangible, will be left behind as remnants such as thoughts, feelings, life and soul/spirit including *Budi* (positive virtues, etc) and *Badi* (negative influence). Ismail Hamid (1991)<sup>4</sup> explained that the soul or spirit is divided into oppositional sides consisting of good and bad. The ancient Malays have been using animals and plants in their thinking associating goodness with the soul of paddy, while bad influence is associated with the soul of the monitor lizard. In addition, Lim (2003)<sup>2</sup> found that the concept of *Budi* originated from the influence of the soul of the paddy as its nature indicates positive virtues because the plant will bend closer to the ground as it grows, signifying a person's increase in humility as they grow older and wiser. On the other hand, *Badi* and its negative connotations are represented by *Lalang* (weedy grass), representing the attributes of being straight and tall throughout time and indicating undesirable characteristics such as pride and arrogance (Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin, 2015)<sup>5</sup>. *Lalang* is also a type of parasite, free to grow without being intentionally planted. Paddy and *Lalang* both represent the dualistic concept of good and bad, which demonstrates the thoughts of the earlier Malays on morals and virtues, structured by their observations of nature and surroundings. In contemporary times, *Budi* continues to shape the Malays' beliefs and cultures by outlining and determining their understanding of the moral compass of good and bad.

Winstedt (1982)<sup>6</sup> revealed that the Malay culture has undergone evolutions from animism to Hinduism, and from Buddhism to Islam in their beliefs. During the rise of the port of Malacca in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Islam was introduced to the Malays and heavily influenced the values of the concept of *Budi* (Abdul Malik, 2015; Aminudin Mansor, 2008; Hashim Musa, 2008; Hashim Musa, et al., 2012)<sup>7,8,9,10</sup>. This paper adopts the concept of *Budi* based on Lim Kim Hui's research,

which focused on the ancient Malay minds, prior to the arrival of Islam. Lim suggested that the Malays view arguments with the purpose of searching for truth, goodness and beauty. Direct confrontation is considered impolite because it promotes negativity by enabling embarrassing and offensive behaviours and speeches out on display. The Malays are more concerned about the outcome of an argument, which should leave each side with positive results rather than winning the argument. The Malays also hold high regard and respect towards elders and higher rank people, showing respect while reminding others to observe themselves from shaming or directly mocking them, particularly in confrontational situations. The concept of *Budi* promotes indirect confrontations and the need to mask their advice as well as criticism by utilizing alternative communication mediums such as the usage of decorative words and metaphors (Lim, 2003; Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin, 2015; Hassan Ahmad, 2003; Julaina Nopiah, et al., 2017; Lim, 2010; Nur Afiqah Wan Mansor & Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin, 2015; Suriati Zakaria & Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin, 2016)<sup>2,5,11,12,13,14,15</sup>. Backtracking or withdrawing from an argument is considered more honourable because it promotes the actions of considering the feelings of others.

*Budi* denotes various virtues describing positive traits that should be practised and demonstrated and is also known as the '*Budi complex*' (Romlah Ramli, 2013)<sup>16</sup>. The Malay social relationships revolve around the '*Budi complex*' (Tham, 1970)<sup>17</sup>, outlining the idea of proper behavioural conduct such as generosity, respect, sincerity, righteousness and discretion. Lim Kim Hui has structured *Budi* as a network similar to a molecular frame and having atoms that branch into mainly *akal* (intellect) and *hati* (heart) and are interrelated to *bahasa/pekerti* (moral behaviour or moral character and action), *bicara* (the well-mannered way of communicating) and *daya* (contribution to the practical aspect/ *budaya*). Each atom is a significant part of *Budi*, strongly interacting with each other and denoting different ways in which *Budi* is practised. *Akal Budi* and *hati Budi* receive more scholarly attention because they are larger roles related to the intellect and feelings, while *bicara*, *pekerti* as well as *daya* are mostly formed through *akal* and *hati* (Aminudin Mansor, 2008)<sup>8</sup>. When a person consistently practices *Budi* and its networks, it may elevate the individual's status, achieving the title of a *Budiman* (a person of *Budi* or a wise person). A *Budiman* displays all-rounded positive virtues, while intellectually rationalizing reasons and the gentleness of the heart to communicate beneficial messages to others. A *Budiman* becomes an example to others and eventually contributes to the betterment of society. On the other hand, *Budi* can also be utilized with a negative connotation, which Lim refers to as 'pure *Budi*'. Pure *Budi* happens when *Budi* is practised in an extreme manner, hence leading a person to overreact (*mengada-ngada*) or self-degrade (*menghina diri*). This exposes opportunities for *Budi* to be used in a negative way such as manipulating the understanding of others for personal gain or *bermain Budi* by "*mengenakan tipu daya (tipu muslihat)*" (Kamus Dewan Edisi Keempat, 2018)<sup>18</sup>, which translates to as using the intellect to deceive. Despite the Malays valuing peaceful outcomes by avoiding direct confrontations, firm actions are encouraged to be undertaken when gentle mannerism is ineffective in confrontations. Therefore, the practice of moderation as one of the elements of Malay social values (Hashim Musa, et al., 2012)<sup>10</sup> should be incorporated while practising *Budi*. In the next section, I address how a fictional character's actions, particularly towards the conclusion of a film, influence the spectator to agree and sympathize with the character through Murray Smith's film spectatorship framework.

## The Structure of Sympathy

According to Smith (1995)<sup>3</sup>, the process of engaging with fictional characters can be cognitively explained under the term ‘sympathy’. Sympathy is defined as “a pro-attitude towards a person or a character that is in a favourable disposition concerned for her well-being, a desire that things go well for her, a tendency to take her side” (Giraldo, 2019)<sup>19</sup>. The elicitation of sympathy towards characters in films can be explained through the process that Smith called the Structure of Sympathy, consisting of 3 interrelated concepts; recognition, alignment and allegiance. Smith suggested that the spectator extends sympathy and other emotional responses to characters through the portrayal of characters in the film. The structure begins with recognition, relating to the process of acknowledgement by the spectator towards a particular character, whereby characters are constructed based on the visual information that is legibly and consistently shown as a representation of a person or other forms of creatures resembling human beings. The second level is alignment, which is when the spectator may learn about the character’s knowledge, actions and feelings, restricted by both spatio-temporal and subjective access. Spatio-temporal attachment relates to the information that is revealed to the spectator when the narration follows a certain character, particularly the protagonist. On the other hand, subjective access relates to deeper information granted to the spectator, which may include the character’s thoughts, emotions, dreams and memories. The third level in the structure is allegiance and it relates to the spectator’s moral evaluation of a character, thus leading the spectator to form a sympathetic or empathetic allegiance. This stage often determines the spectator’s engagement with a character through the process of evaluation, and responses in the forms of emotions and intellect (Pöttsch, 2013)<sup>20</sup>. Alignment and allegiance are both pluralistic concepts that may involve the spectator’s engagement with more than one character. Sympathy or empathy with characters of conflicting moral values can also be formed by protagonists and villains when their backstories are revealed, showcasing the sides of their humanity (Ioannidou, 2012; Klift, 2014)<sup>21,22</sup>. Additionally, the spectator’s engagement with characters may also change throughout the course of the film, such as extending sympathy from one character to another and may include the preference of multiple characters as well. The Structure of Sympathy is particularly significant in explaining the spectator’s viewing experience, leading them to lean towards preferring a character or more due to the actions taken that should be in accordance with positive virtues, which in this case is related to *Budi*.

## Animation in Malaysia

Before delving into the analysis of the film, it is important to shed some light on the animation industry in Malaysia which began after the establishment of the Malaysian Film Unit (MFU) in 1946 by the British. A British army cameraman, Gillie Potter was tasked to lead and teach the locals about film and broadcasting matters. In 1963, the Malaysian Film Unit was renamed Filem Negara Malaysia (FNM) and produced Malaysia’s first animated short called *Hikayat Sang Kancil* which began broadcasting to the public in 1983 (Hassan Muthalib, 2016)<sup>1</sup>. Hassan Muthalib’s animation-making contribution in 1988 encouraged the local animation industry to further develop (Bendazzi, 2016)<sup>23</sup>. His works, including public service films and narrative short projects, had managed to attract audiences due to their meaningful and humorous content. His short animation works are still known today and are based on Malaysia’s iconic animal character, *Sang Kancil* (mousedeer) with titles such as *Sang Kancil dan Monyet (The Mousedeer and the Monkey, 1984)*, *Gagak Yang Bijak (The Clever Crow, 1985)* and *Sang Kancil dan Buaya (The Mousedeer and the*

*Crocodiles*, 1987). At that time, it was observed that there was potential for various opportunities within the developing industry. Hence, the government institution established the Multimedia Development Corporation (MDEC) now known as Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation Sdn Bhd in order to support the local creative industry. Consequently, this decision positively boosted the production of the local animation industry with Malaysia's first animated series, *Usop Sontorian* premiering in 1995 with its idea based on the humour magazine *Gila-Gila* created by Ujang in 1978. In 1997, the animated series *Kampung Boy* (1997) was released, inspired by the creator's (*Lat*) childhood experiences in a Malay village in the 1950s and 1960s. Other animation titles such as *Keluang Man* (1998) and *Anak-anak Sidek (The Children of Sidek)*, 1999) were released later and were positively well received by local audiences. According to Lent (2004)<sup>24</sup>, the stylistic and textual traits of the characters and artworks during this timeframe appear to be uniquely distinguished from other countries.

Malaysia saw its first release of a full-length feature film in 1998 with the release of *Silat Lagenda* produced by Hassan Muthalib and premiered in cinemas. This is followed by *Putih* (2001), *Cheritera* (2001) and *Budak Lapok* (2007). With the development of 3-Dimensional (3D) technology, Malaysia produced its first 3D animated feature called *Nien Resurrection* in 2000, which was internationally distributed in the form of video compact disc format (VCD). In 2007, *Upin & Ipin* began broadcasting on local television as a series of short animations and prompted more support from the local audiences. This prompted the government to launch MAC3 by MDEC in Cyberjaya in 2010 to assist local creative content creators by providing technology, talent and resources. The support from the government continues to encourage the growing number of animation and gaming studios established with the intention to utilize 3D technology further enabling the production of various films that managed to enter the international market such as *Geng: Pengembaraan Bermula (Gang: The Adventure Begins)*, 2009), *Seefood* (2012), *War of the Worlds: Goliath* (2012), *Bola Kampung: The Movie* (2013), *Boboiboy: The Movie* (2016), *Upin & Ipin: Keris Siamang Tunggal* (2019), *Boboiboy: Movie 2* (2019) and *Ejen Ali: The Movie* (2019). At this point, Malaysian animation is observed to be influenced by foreign traits and formats particularly Japanese and American cartoons and in return, marks the decrease of the original value in its own style. Regardless, the positively well-received animation works in contemporary Malaysian animation still exhibit Malaysian culture, languages, traditions, and values in an interesting and attractive format (Dahlan Bin Abdul Ghani, 2015; Mohd Amin Mat Omar, 2015; Nur Salawati Mohd Nadzria & Hanita Hassan, 2013)<sup>25,26,27</sup>. Considering that the animation industry in Malaysia is relatively young in comparison to other countries, there is a lack of academic research, particularly in regard to the selected film *Boboiboy: The Movie*. Little discussions address the film from the perspective of character design (Faryna Mohd Khalis, et al., 2016; Mohd Suhaimi Juhan & Norlela Ismail, 2019)<sup>28,229</sup> and suggest heavy influences from Japanese animation.

### **Analysis of *Boboiboy: The Movie* (2016)**

*Boboiboy: The Movie* features a theme that closely resembles traits from Japanese animation or anime style and techniques such as the inclusion of long fighting scenes as one of its many focuses and featuring young child characters as superhero protagonists. The superhero archetype is a western concept that presents characters with good-looking, powerful and strong traits with a magnetism that can very easily attract audiences' engagement (Faryna Mohd Khalis, et al. 2016)<sup>28</sup>. Despite that, the concept of superheroes has existed in other parts of the world including Malaysia.



This can be observed in Malay literature's epic tales or *hikayat* such as *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*, *Hikayat Hang Tuah* and *Hikayat Inderaputera*. According to Manuskrip Melayu Pusaka (Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia, n.d.)<sup>30</sup>, *Hikayat* often narrates the stories of extraordinarily brave heroes who often have magical abilities or special weapons to help them with the task to overcome various obstacles. Despite the differences in appearances and narrative forms from western superheroes due to regional and cultural differences, Malay heroes are described in texts to have physical and internal strength and are demonstrated as an example to society, particularly from the perspective of *Budi*. Similarly, *Boboiboy* and his friends who are portrayed as superheroes in a speculative futuristic and modernized Malaysian world, also demonstrate the virtues of *Budi* through their behaviours, interactions and actions taken. This is a conscious decision made by the animation filmmakers as they are targeting a wide range of audiences, particularly children. A child may strongly identify with another child of similar age, especially with their own race and gender (Dore, 2022)<sup>31</sup>. Characters who are children may also have a greater impact in evoking the spectator's emotions as they represent innocence, and weakness and therefore evokes the need to protect them. Despite these characters being portrayed as superheroes with various superpowers, they are still seen as young children with emotional and mental states resembling real children.

*Boboiboy: The Movie* is a production by Animonsta Studios and tells the story and adventures of *Boboiboy* with his friends. The film carries the theme of friendship exhibiting the beginning of their adventures on a mysterious floating island containing an ancient power in the form of a spherical robot called *Klamkobot*. They venture to the island in an attempt to rescue their robot friend, *Ochobot*, kidnapped by a group of alien treasure hunters called *Tengkotak*. Through various obstacles, challenges and confrontations, *Boboiboy* and his friends acquire new powers and manage to defeat the villains in the end. *Ochobot*, who had inherited the special teleportation skill, is also saved and revived by *Klamkobot*'s remaining strength. The film's narrative is based on the binary opposites of the good and evil structure, making the role of the protagonist *Boboiboy* clear as a morally exemplary person who demonstrates the practice of *Budi* from the start of the film. According to Smith's Structure of Sympathy, the recognition level brings the spectator to identify *Boboiboy* as a superhero archetype. Despite being physically strong and powerful, he exhibits naiveté, cheerfulness, and friendliness when interacting with other characters. Earlier in the film, he is portrayed as a friend who often unintentionally breaks promises and this is a normal childlike trait in contrast to his heroic role. Regardless of his friends' short abandonment of him due to them being frustrated with his decision to unnecessarily help others rather than spending time with them, he does not spend a long time succumbing to negative thoughts and worries but overcomes this by being proactive in taking alternative actions that would please his friends, which demonstrates his understanding of *Budi*. He also displays loyalty towards his friends with his immediate departure to rescue *Ochobot* kidnapped by villains.

After the characters are introduced and re-identified, the narrative will guide the spectator to experience the process of alignment. The characters' viewpoints, states of mind and being, ideologies, thoughts and beliefs are shared via various filmmaking techniques. In this case, *Boboiboy*'s strong sense of justice, courage and naivete, result in his prioritization of upholding justice because he believes that it is his priority as he has the powers to do so. These traits are also supported in the early part of the film the camera pans to show his wall that is mounted with his heroic achievements through newspaper cuttings and awards. The alignment with his subjectivity also enables the spectator to understand his deep sense of justice, responsibility and friendship. There are various representations of *Budi* in the film mainly demonstrated by *Boboiboy* through

the narrative. The storyline highlights the various values of *Budi* with friendship as its main theme. *Ochobot* being kidnapped instigated *Boboiboy* and his friends' journey to an unknown location in order to rescue their precious friend. This indicates their sacrifice as they willingly leave their comfort zone to venture into unknown territory and face dangers that would cost them their lives. Their *hati Budi* and *akal Budi* are illustrated through their strong friendships, co-operations and willingness to take risky actions to ensure their friend's safety and this highlights the main motive of their adventures.

By gaining various information and understanding about the protagonist through internal and external personality traits and subjectivity, the spectator will then go through the final stage of the structure of sympathy, which is allegiance. The spectator would be intellectually and emotionally approving or disapproving of the character's actions based on the moral evaluation represented by *Budi*. Additionally, the structure of sympathy is a flexible concept that may describe the local spectator as having already established a certain level of allegiance with the character throughout the film. This is due to factors such as the representation of Malaysian stereotypical iconography of local races and other related narratives that are known by the spectator before viewing the film such as animated television series and comic works. The inclusion of different Malaysian races reflects the real Malaysia as a multi-racial country and this creates a sense of unity and harmony as the narrative demonstrates strong friendship and their dependency on each other.

In many of *Boboiboy*'s fighting scenes, there are a lot of instances demonstrating his strength, which originates from his strong regard towards friendship that entices the spectator to support his actions. Through the upgrades of *Boboiboy*'s powers, his character development can be observed as well. In the final battle scene, he is able to generate five elemental powers, which is more than what he displayed earlier in the film. In addition, his finishing moves further demonstrate his growth when he delivers seven types of different elemental powers. His superpower growth reflects his steadfastness in utilizing his *hati Budi* as he does not surrender in fights but instead, pushes on to become better and eventually defeat the enemies. The long fighting scene illustrates his perseverance and determination in protecting and saving all living beings, consequently building up the spectator's emotional engagement. Through the fight scenes and interactions exhibited by *Boboiboy*, various branches of the *Budi* complex are demonstrated. His strong sense of justice and concern for others originates from his *hati Budi* and is also a driving force for him to strive in winning the fights against the alien villains. Despite the discouragement of *Budi* in engaging in direct confrontations, the concept also encourages the use of *akal Budi*, leading its practitioner to exercise necessary actions in certain situations, including violence. Violent scenes portrayed through the fights also mimic Malay literary stories or *hikayat* with the purpose of fighting for justice and defeating evil such as defending homelands, which is a part of the Malay spirit and patriotism. An example can be drawn from *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, which includes a physical battle between the protagonist and his friend, *Hang Jebat*. Feeling unjust for the sentencing of his friend, *Hang Tuah*, to death due to false and baseless rumors, *Hang Jebat* rebelled against the sultan. However, he was faced with *Hang Tuah* who has a strong sense of justice and patriotism. Similarly, *Boboiboy*'s strong sense of justice and loyalty towards his friends are virtues of *Budi* and are demonstrated through his physical fights and battles with the villains. His emotions and sincerity can be observed through his powers and attacks delivered for the sake of punishing the evildoers. The long fighting scenes enable the spectator to experience his struggles, sincerity and perseverance which consequently influence the spectator's emotional evaluation leaning heavily in favour of supporting his victory and happy ending.

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## Conclusion

The portrayal of fighting scenes and actions undertaken by *Boboiboy* is a method that represents a part of the contemporary practice of *Budi*. The utilization of direct confrontations may be a solution in dire situations to save and protect harmony. The deliverance of justice through *Budi* is ultimately represented in the visual form of the final blow to stop the enemies from continuously committing more evil deeds. The narrative that gradually develops the characters to grow during the duration of the film is based on the character's practice of *Budi* and leads towards the ending of a positive outcome as a result. This includes the direct confrontational actions that are still undertaken according to *Budi* as the moral compass causing the spectator to understand and accept such actions, enabling the extension of sympathy. Hence, *Budi* is a significant essence of Malay moral values and is still deeply rooted in the Malay worldview today.

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