



## **ANIMALS ON FILM: POSSIBILITIES FOR MALAYSIAN CINEMA**

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ANIMALS ON FILM: POSSIBILITIES FOR MALAYSIAN CINEMA

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the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Applied Arts with Honours  
(Cinematography)

Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts  
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2013

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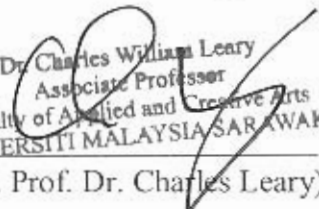
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## ABSTRAK

### FILEM HAIWAN: POTENSI DALAM SINEMA MALAYSIA

Teo Peuh Ing

Kajian ini meneroka potensi penggunaan haiwan sebagai watak utama atau subjek terpenting dalam sinema Malaysia. Kebanyakan filem haiwan dilibatkan dengan cerita sentimental yang dikelilingi oleh isu-isu kekeluargaan atau persahabatan. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk menganalisa beberapa contoh filem haiwan yang vierjaya dan membawa teknik tersebut ke dalam sinema Malaysia, dengan harapan untuk mempromosikan filem haiwan sebagai salah satu jenis filem yang boleh menjadikan tarikan penonton di Malaysia. Hasil kajian ini diaplikasikan dalam sebuah video pendek, yang diwatakkan oleh seekor kuda, berjudul '*Budak Kampung*', yang mengisahkan tentang konflik antara ahli keluarga dengan kuda tersebut.

## ABSTRACT

### ANIMALS ON FILM: POSSIBILITIES FOR MALAYSIAN CINEMA

Teo Peuh Ing

*This research explores the possibilities of using animals as main characters or subject matter in Malaysian cinema. Animal films often involve a sentimental story revolving around a family melodrama. The research objectives include the analysis of successful examples of international animal films and the potential to bring such successful techniques to the Malaysian film industry, with the hope of promoting animal films as a viable genre in Malaysia. The research has then been applied to a locally-produced short animal film, starring a horse, entitled "Budak Kampung".*

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Introduction

In between the years of 1872 to 1885, Jules-Etienne Marey and Eadweard Muybridge searched for methods of capturing animals via photographs. Marey had photographed birds in flight and falling cats whereas Muybridge tried to catch the horse in motion. Although the equipment was limited during their time, both of them still developed their own methods and invented equipment to make the photos or the motion look real.

Generally, animals frequently appear as key characters in Asian and Western films. Often they will be cast alongside the main human characters. *War Horse*, *Hachi: A Dog's Tale*, *Flicka*, *Equus* and *The Birds* are some successful examples in which the films include animals such as horses, dogs and birds as the main character. Recently, Taiwanese-born American film director, Ang Lee produced a new film, *The Life of Pi*, based on the novel by Yann Martel, in which an Indian boy lives with a tiger on a boat after surviving a storm at sea. However, the tiger is not played by a real tiger but recreated with 3D animation.

Chinese language films nowadays occupy much of the film market in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia and other Asia countries too. Among the box-office films, there are rarely animals as the protagonist to tell a story. Most of the storylines focus on the relationship among humans. There are animals often in war films, but they are mostly as transportation for the warriors. For example, horses are the common animals which appear in most of the war films as transportation, such as in *The Treasure Hunter*, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *Painted Skin* and many more. However, Hong Kong did produce an animal film, *Every Dog Has Its Date* [完美情人 *Yuan Mei Ching Yan*], in which a spirit of a man is exchanged with the spirit of a dog during a heavy rain. After the incident, the dog disappears while the man behaves with a dog's personality, and lives with the dog's master.

Animals used in Malaysia's films are just the side character for a particular scene or shot. For example, our late Malaysian director Yasmin Ahmad had used a dog for a shot in *Gubra*. In this shot, a Malay mosque leader touches a dog that sits by the road he takes to the mosque. There also is a scene in Yasmin's *Muallaf* where a Chinese man is licked by a dog on his hand and then wishes to shake hands with a Malay Datuk, but the Datuk rejects. Independent Malaysian filmmaker U-Wei Hj Saari had used bulls in his directed film, *Jogho*, which mean the bull keeper. Although the film mainly takes place in Thailand, it depicts the society of continuous revenge among the Malays in Kelantan, Malaysia in the olden days. The message is allegorically conveyed through the fighting among the bulls. Animals rarely appear in local Chinese films as well. If they do, they are just the minor or side characters in order to match the personality of the main characters. For example, the wolf dogs in the latest film *Kepong Gangster* are to show the status of the fierce personality of the loan shark.

Thus, this thesis is written with the belief that Malaysian film productions and the Chinese film productions around the world have the potential to produce a film in which an animal is the main character, besides focusing on only human characters. It can be done in

order to awake the public about animal abuse issues. Popular media can also awaken the audiences that abandon their pets or animals when they are useless or sick. Animals have feelings too, and they have the right to be treated well.

### **1.1 Problem Statement**

In order to make an animal film, a production crew as well as the actors need a lot of time and effort to understand the behaviour of a particular animal. The preparation in pre-production might take a longer time compared to a regular film's pre-production. Jonathan Burt (2002), in his book, *Animal in Film*, states the problems faced by our local filmmakers: "Considering that the possible themes and scenarios for animal films appear to be quite limited and yet are extraordinarily difficult and time-consuming to make, one may wonder at the cultural investment in the production of such film" (p. 14). When shooting an animal film, compared to other common genres, producers have to consider a lot of precautions during pre-production. During the location recce, the production team needs to become familiar with the particular animal's habitat and their living style. They need to communicate well with the owner or trainer about what angles and shots they want. Pre-training for the actors acting with the animals takes a lot of time too. The budget dealing with animals is much bigger than other films as the producer needs to consider the insurance for the animals and any potential danger to the talents, transportation in transporting the animals to the shooting locations, extra equipment for the camera departments such as micro-lens to have an extreme close-up shot for particular inserts, daily rates for the animals, and expenses for owners of the animals, animal trainers, animal therapists, veterinarians, ambulances, and the daily meals and medical check-up for the particular animal.

Malaysia is multi-religious country which includes Islam, Buddhist, Hindu and Christian. Each of these religions (partly not include Christian) has their own forbidden

animals which they are not allowed to touch and to eat. Because of this issue, many local filmmakers hesitate to make an animal film with a particular animal that might offend the beliefs of some fellow Malaysians.

However, this study on animal in film was done with the hope that there is nonetheless a potential for animal characters in Malaysia cinema. A study of animals in popular international films such as *The Horse Whisperer* and *War Horse* will also help to explain this potential.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

In this thesis, the writer will focus on the challenges that film productions in Malaysia face in producing films with animals in the leading roles. The writer will survey the percentage of Malaysia audiences who would accept animals in films. The writer will also analyse the two western films and the potential application of these films to Malaysia cinema. I would like to answer the following questions in my final research:

- i) What is the potential of animal character in a film?
- ii) Could a human-animal relationship be revealed in local film?

## **1.3 Research Objectives**

The objectives for the researcher to do the research are:

- i) To analyse some successful example of animal films and bring their technique to Malaysia cinema.
- ii) To awake the Malaysian film industry to the possibilities of the animal film genre film.

#### **1.4 Research Methodology**

To conduct the research, the researcher would use a qualitative method. The researcher will do a content analysis on successful example of animal films from the aspect of the story and the animals' reaction in front of the camera.

#### **1.5 Project Scope**

The research will be done based on animal in film, with a focus on the technique of the expression of the particular animal to tell the story in a film. Then, such expression will be attempted in a short film highlighting the relationship between an animal and its master.



## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.0 History of Animals in Film

Before the invention of the cinema, the possibility of moving pictures had been explored by experiments in photography by Jules-Etienne Marey and Eadweard Muybridge. Animals played an important role in their research.

Eadweard Muybridge was an expert in animal locomotion as well as photography. In 1872, Muybridge was hired by Leland Stanford, the former governor of California, a businessman and race-horse owner, to investigate the solution for the problem of whether or not four hooves of a horse left the ground during the gallop, with the purpose of applying this research to optimizing the running of his horses in races. He used a single camera before he developed a camera with a quicker shutter speed and faster film emulsions in order to capture the horse in motion. On 15 June 1878, Muybridge placed multiples cameras in a line along the edge of the track. The shutter of each camera was triggered by a thread as the horse passed by. At the same time, Muybridge introduced a moving picture projector, zoopraxiscope. He copied the images in the form of silhouettes onto a disc to be view in the device. The device was later regarded as an early movie projector, and the process as an

intermediate stage toward motion pictures or cinematography. In 1901, he published *The Human Figure in Motion* and *Horse in Motion*.

10 years later, in 1882, Étienne-Jules Marey invented equipment he named the chronophotography gun, which enabled him to record the same picture with the speed of 12 frames per second. With the device, Marey conducted experiments of the action of birds' wings and the movement of the shark's fins in water. In 1892, he pictured the horse's hooves while in 1894, he filmed a falling cat.

Muybridge's work focused more on zoological locomotion in the form of story, with aesthetic and the atrical ambitions, to complement the vision of movement depicted by artists. Whereas, Marey's works focused more on indistinct continuous movements, analytic and scientific, concerned with revealing something invisible to the human eye. Both Marey and Muybridge had their own creative techniques in developing the new technology in their time. Each of the photos they took or even the motions they filmed had their own styles and characteristics

## **2.1. Human - Animal Relationship**

Jerry Cope, who is a designer, filmmaker and eco-activist, had stated in one of his article that, "In the past few years, films focusing on animals have dramatically shifted their focus from nature oriented to an examination of the changing relationship between humans and animals. They represent a growing awareness that our treatment of animals and attitudes towards them are evolving into a more healthy respect for life in general" (Cope, 2011).

Jonathan Burt had proposed two dimensions to the representation of animals in film which are acting animal and cultural connotations an animal carries in the visual field. The dimension of acting animals describes the kinds of roles that animals often play, mostly in fiction films. It is not just the mechanics of training, but the interactions between animals and

humans including the general effects sought by the filmmakers and their impact on an audience. Jonathan Burt describes Lassie in *Lassie Comes Home*:

““when Lassie climbs out of a river and, instead of doing what comes naturally to a dog, which is to shake off the water, he staggers about bedraggled and exhausted, this is seen as a mark of what makes Lassie such a great actor. Lassie is in fact doing all sorts of things: responding to his training; utilizing his understanding of the context in which he is placed; and behaving more like a human than a dog.”” (2002, p.32)

Unintentionally, animals would come to determine their own effect as much as they are determined by the position they are placed in by humans.

The second factor, which concerns the cultural connotations an animal carries in visual representation, relates to the question of treatment and welfare. Jonathan Burt argues that “the development in animal welfare was not simply a sentimental or nostalgic project to recover a lost harmonious relation with the natural world, broken by industrialism and increasing urbanization, but also something forward looking, an integral component of an improved future” (2002, p.35).

## **2.2 Earlier Animal Stars**

### **2.2.1 Jean, the Vitagraph Dog**

Jean was the first dog who active in the film industry. Her master was a writer, named Laurence Trimble. Under a coincidental, Laurence and Jean was on the set of the film shooting of *The Vitagraph Girl* at the Vitagraph Studio and been asked to play opposite Florence Turner, an American actress. From the day on, Jean was known as ‘The Vitagraph Dog’ and Laurence been a director who was then directed quite an amount of silent films along with Jean and Florence Turner, such as *Jean and the Calico Doll*, *Jean and the Waif*,

and *Jean Goes Fishing*. She died in 1916. She was the precursor to other dog actors such as Teddy, Rin Tin Tin, Lassie and the Sennett Dog.

### 2.2.2 Strongheart

Strongheart was a male Shepherd dog whose his owner was also the writer and director, Laurence Trimble. After the death of Jean, Laurence continued to do silent dog films along with Strongheart and produced *The Silent Call* (1921), *Brawn of the North* (1922), *The Love Master* (1924), *North Star* (1925), a book adaptation of *White Fang* (1925), and *The Return of Boston Blackie* (1927). He was died in 1929 in an accident of a burning of the hot studio light, which the accident was then caused him a tumor. Two books, *Kinship with All Life* and *Letter to Strongheart* had been written under the hand of J. Allen Boone, for the remembered of Strongheart.

### 2.3.3 Pal, the Lassie

Lassie actually is the name of a female collie dog character created by Eric Knight in his novel, *Lassie Come-Home*. This novel was then been filmed by MGM in 1943 as *Lassie Come Home*, with a dog named Pal to play the role of Lassie. Although the credit appeared as 'Pal as Lassie', Pal was well known as Lassie. Pal's owner and trainer was Rudd Weatherwax. Pal started his career as a stunt dog as Rudd Weatherwax was the animal trainer for MGM animal films. On the shooting of *Lassie Come Home*, Pal played so well for the stunt action for the female collie dog and caused the director willing to change the dog character to Pal and reshoot the scenes which had been shot six weeks before. Pal actually had been sent to the audition for the film but been rejected because of he was a male and his physical appearance which they thought it might not suitable for the screen and the character. After the success of *Lassie Come Home*, Pal continued filmed in six more MGM's films, which are

*Son of Lassie* (1945), *Courage of Lassie* (1946), *Hills of Home* (1948), *The Sun Comes Up* (1949), *Challenged to Lassie* (1950) and *The Painted Hills* (1951). Pal was died in 1958 in the age of 18 (126 age in dog years) because of old age sickness. However, his descendant stilled played the role of Lassie. A book entitled *The Story of Lassie: His Discovery and Training from Puppyhood to Stardom* was written by Rudd Weatherwax along with John H. Rothwell in 1950.

## **2.3 Present Animal Stars**

### **2.3.1 Uggie**

Uggie is an energetic puppy who works very hard for his career. His owner is Omar von Muller who had spotted him and brought him to the film industry. The attention to Uggie was from a silent film in 2011 *The Artist*, along with Jean Dujardin. Omar and the other trainer Sarah Clifford spent three days to train the actor to communicate and understand the signal of Uggie. Before this massive film, Uggie had been acted in *What's Up Scarlett* (2005), *What's Up Rockers* (2005), *Mr. Fix It* (2006) and *Water for Elephant* (2011). He even won many awards for his excellent performance such as Palm Dog Award at 2011 Cannes Film Festival, Prix Lumiere Awards Golden Collar Awards and much more.

### **2.3.2 Finders Key**

Finders Key was a race horse in Orange County, Calif before he becomes an equine star. His first appearance on screen was *Seabiscuit* in 2003, wrangling by Rusty Hendrickson. In 2005, he appeared in *The Legend of Zorro* and played a Joey role in Stephen Spielberg latest film, *War Horse*.

## CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.0 Introduction

In this research, the researcher will use content analysis of two animal films, *The Horse Whisperer* and *War Horse*. The films are analysed for the aspect of story flow, camera angles and shots, animal as the main character, and the relationship between the animal and its master.

The story in most animal films is related to the family. It could be the misunderstanding between the animal and a family member, or a challenge which the animal has to overcome to get back everything back into normal. There are close up shots of the animal in the films such as the close up of the eyes, the legs, the mouth and the other parts of them to show what they are doing and looking or maybe symbolically suggest some meaning.

### 3.1 Film Analysis

The first film *The Horse Whisperer* (1998), directed by Robert Redford, was chosen because it fully shows the relation between a veterinarian and his horse patient, sharing a communication by whispering in their heart. *War Horse* (2011) reveals the determination of a

horse to live in meeting with different people and situations as well as the revealing of the realistic among humans during the four year war.

### 3.2 *The Horse Whisperer* (1998)

*The Horse Whisperer* tells a story of a traumatized horse that had an accident with his rider, Grace, causing her to lose her leg. The horse is then sent to a man known as a "horse whisperer" for psychological treatment. The introduction of *The Horse Whisperer* reveals the beauty of the horse, named Pilgrim, as he gallops perfectly over the desert. At the end of this scene, we see a girl is riding him happily with her voice-over laughing. Then, we know it is a beautiful dream dreamed by a girl, Grace, as the shot cutsto the shot where she wakes up and slips away from the house quietly.

Animals are creatures that cannot talk to humans. Thus, their eyes are the good connection in communicate with us. The technique of eye-contact is appeared in most of the animal films. Before the accident tragedy, Grace goes to the stable and meets with Pilgrim. She asks Pilgrim: "What are you thinking, huh? What are you thinking, boy?" There is a close up shot of Pilgrim's single eye. Jonathan Burt indicates that the answer to the question above can only be determined by the horse's actions. After the accident, Pilgrim hides in a tunnel, badly injured. Then, come a few vets towards him. In this scene, there are few shots showing the point of view of Pilgrim, in which the vision is blurred. Pilgrim feels insecure as he could not see anything and starts to neigh in defending himself. After a few shots, we cut to the hospital scene where Grace opens her eyes. Her point of view when looking at her parents is blurred too. During the visit of Grace after the accident, the traumatized horse looks at Grace with his angry and insecure eye, with the large scar on the right hand side under it. After that, the mother, Annie, looks straight into Pilgrim's eyes. The director is using the technique of dolly in both Annie's and Pilgrim's eyes. In this context, the meaning produced is that of

Annie trying to figure out what the horse wants through the eyes contact. Pilgrim is then being send to Montana for his psychology treatment with Tom Booker, who is known as 'horse whisperer'.

After the therapy treatment, we can see Pilgrim has again found his spirit. In the scene where Grace is ready to ride on Pilgrim, Pilgrim seems to not know what is happening. Thus, he rises up his ear with the sudden action of Tom who puts on the saddle on his back. Although Grace is ready for the ride, Pilgrim seems not ready. Thus, he neighs and moves backward when Tom is pulling him towards Grace. In the point of view of Pilgrim, we see Grace slightly out of focus but luminescent. Jonathan Burt explains the shot as, "in keeping with the religious symbolism of the film, Grace is not merely visible to Pilgrim but actually illuminated as if she were a vision." Pilgrim raises his ears immediately when Pilgrim's eyes look again on Grace's. He neighs, jumps and moves backwards to show that he is angry (with his nostrils flaring) and refuses to be ridden again. Tom then ties up Pilgrim's front left leg. When he whips Pilgrim, Pilgrim runs on his three other legs. We can feel that he is in pain when we see a close up of Pilgrim's eye, begging for release. Tom keeps pulling the tied leg until Pilgrim falls down. In the interpretation of this shot, Tom would like to make Pilgrim feel the same as Grace, who had lost her leg after the accident. Pilgrim seems to calm down when he lays on the ground while Tom asks Grace to sit on Pilgrim. After Pilgrim seems to understand something, he stands up with Grace on his back. He then gallops with Grace as he has overcomes the trauma. When Grace pats him after the gallop, Pilgrim's ears point downwards. This shot showing that he has been released from his nightmare of the accident and ready to be controlled by his master again. This forgiveness scene shows the audiences that animals could understand what they are been told.