

## Retelling the Myth of Timun Mas through Aniwayang 'Ijo dan Emas'

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the reinterpretation of the well-known Javanese folktale Timun Mas through the short animation Ijo dan Emas (2023), produced by Aniwayang Studio. Unlike the conventional narrative that highlights Timun Mas as a heroine against the evil ogre Buto Ijo, Ijo dan Emas reimagines the myth from the perspective of Buto Ijo, challenging the binary opposition between good and evil. Written by Andina Subarja and directed by Daud Nugraha, this animation film introduces a novel use of colored wayang puppets, where green and gold motifs are embedded in the carved perforations of the main characters to align with their names and symbolic identities. This creative intervention not only extends the expressive potential of shadow play but also embodies a new aesthetic dialogue between tradition and modern animation practice. Using a semiotic approach, the study analyzes how symbols, colors, and narrative shifts produce fresh layers of meaning and invite viewers to reconsider myths as fluid cultural texts. The paper argues that Ijo dan Emas demonstrates the power of re-narrating folklore in digital forms to sustain cultural memory while fostering new interpretations relevant to contemporary audiences in Indonesia and beyond.

### KEYWORDS

Aniwayang, Timun Mas, Semiotics, Myth, Indonesian Animation



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## Indonesian Myth of Timun Mas

Indonesian Myths, with their rich cultural heritage and moral values, have long been an integral part of Indonesia's collective identity. Among these, the tale of Timun Mas (The Golden Cucumber) stands as one of the most well-known and frequently retold stories, inspiring various forms of art—from theater and literature to film and animation. The story of Timun Mas and Buto Ijo portrays the struggle of a young girl who, through her intelligence and courage, triumphs over a man-eating giant. Embedded within the tale are profound moral values emphasizing wit, bravery, and perseverance in facing life's great challenges—encouraging audiences to uphold goodness even when confronted with overwhelming fear (Waryati, 2021).

However, as media evolve and traditional narratives are reimagined through contemporary lenses, new interpretations emerge—offering not only a refreshing perspective but also deeper philosophical reflection. One notable example is the short

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animation *Ijo dan Emas* (The Green and the Gold), produced by Aniwayang Studio as part of its innovative series. This film reinterprets the Timun Mas folktale by shifting its narrative focus from the heroine to the supposed villain—Buto Ijo.

In this version, the story departs from the conventional binary of good versus evil. Instead of portraying Buto Ijo as a purely malevolent figure, the animation presents him as a complex and empathetic character, complete with emotions, loneliness, and moral dilemmas. Through this narrative inversion, *Ijo dan Emas* challenges the audience to see beyond the surface of mythic archetypes and reconsider the nature of morality, compassion, and otherness.

By adopting Buto Ijo's point of view, *Ijo dan Emas* dismantles the moral rigidity of the original folktale, revealing its ethical ambiguities. The film invites viewers to question traditional conceptions of good and evil, suggesting that in every story, no character is wholly right or wrong. This narrative strategy aligns with poststructuralist and deconstructive approaches to myth—particularly those proposed by Derrida (1978) and Barthes (1972)—which emphasize the fluidity of meaning and the instability of binary oppositions.

Furthermore, *Ijo dan Emas* signifies an important shift in the way contemporary audiences engage with folklore. Rather than treating traditional stories as fixed cultural artifacts to be merely preserved, the animation demonstrates how they can be reinterpreted, recontextualized, and revitalized through modern creative media. This process not only enriches the visual and emotional experience for viewers but also provides new pathways for cultural understanding and transmission.

As Sari (2023) notes, animation that integrates local wisdom—such as those produced by Aniwayang Studio—holds significant potential as both an educational and cultural medium. The hybridization of wayang aesthetics with digital animation allows for an innovative platform that serves not only as entertainment but also as a pedagogical tool. It enables traditional characters and moral lessons to be experienced by younger generations in an engaging, relatable, and meaningful manner.

This study aims to explore how *Ijo dan Emas* utilizes animation not merely as a visual medium but as a philosophical and cultural discourse that deconstructs the traditional Timun Mas myth. By reconfiguring narrative perspective and character complexity, the film challenges established cultural paradigms and fosters new interpretations of identity, morality, and empathy. Moreover, this analysis examines how such works contribute to contemporary cultural discourse in Indonesia, particularly in reconnecting younger audiences with traditional wisdom in a globalized digital age.

Ultimately, this research seeks to illuminate the innovative dimensions of *Ijo dan Emas* and its impact on how we perceive myth, folklore, and the transformative power of

media in reconstructing cultural narratives. It is hoped that this discussion will broaden scholarly understanding of how animation, as an evolving artistic medium, can serve as a dynamic tool for cultural preservation, reinterpretation, and renewal.

## Animating Local Wisdom of Indonesia

Animation has evolved far beyond its initial purpose as a form of entertainment to become an effective and powerful medium of communication. With its ability to convey stories through dynamic and expressive visuals, animation possesses a unique capacity to communicate traditional values in a way that is engaging, accessible, and meaningful. Through the design of characters, the use of music, language, setting, and embedded values, animation can authentically represent culture and serve as an essential tool in preserving and sustaining cultural heritage (Panjaitan, 2023). In an increasingly interconnected world, animation has emerged as one of the most effective methods for storytelling—whether for educational, entertainment, or social transformation purposes.

Animation holds strategic potential as a visual communication medium capable of conveying complex messages effectively and engagingly, making it a powerful tool in reaching diverse audiences (Subandrio, 2025). As a visual language, animation bridges cultural layers, visualizes abstract concepts, and delivers messages in ways that are aesthetically captivating and easily understood. The accessibility of digital technologies has further expanded the creative boundaries of animation, allowing artists and storytellers to experiment with new visual styles and narrative techniques.

An exemplary case of this evolution is the 2023 animated short *Ijo dan Emas* (The Green and the Gold), produced by Aniwayang Studio. The film adapts the traditional Timun Mas folktale with a contemporary approach, offering a new perspective on Buto Ijo—a character long perceived as entirely villainous. This reinterpretation demonstrates how animation opens new spaces for meaning-making and cultural reflection. Rather than simply retelling a myth, *Ijo dan Emas* reimagines it, giving narrative depth and emotional complexity to a once one-dimensional antagonist.

In *Ijo dan Emas*, Buto Ijo is no longer portrayed merely as a monster to be defeated; instead, he is granted his own voice and viewpoint. This narrative inversion disrupts the binary paradigm that classifies characters as either good or evil, encouraging audiences to think critically about the moral assumptions embedded in traditional folklore. As a medium, animation not only visualizes stories but also becomes a tool for exploring layered meanings and prompting reflection on the moral complexities of myths.

As an art form grounded in visual expression and movement, animation possesses a distinctive power to make myth accessible and appealing across age groups—children, adolescents, and adults alike. In the case of *Ijo dan Emas*, animation transforms an

ancient story that might otherwise feel distant or outdated into a narrative relevant to contemporary society. Through vivid visual design, dynamic character animation, and advanced storytelling techniques, the film delivers the Timun Mas myth in a form that evokes both emotional engagement and critical thought.

Moreover, animation offers greater creative freedom in expressing mythological elements. The characters' movements, facial expressions, and the imaginative use of settings and fantasy elements in *Ijo dan Emas* not only enliven the story but also add symbolic depth to each scene. As a narrative medium, animation enables the transmission of moral lessons embedded within myths in a layered and captivating manner—avoiding the rigidity that may be present in more traditional forms of storytelling such as oral recitation or shadow puppetry.

One of the most significant contributions of animation to society lies in its ability to bridge traditional mythology with modern realities. In *Ijo dan Emas*, there is a conscious effort to connect the gap between tradition and technology, and between older generations who are familiar with folktales through oral traditions and younger generations who engage primarily with digital media. By using animation as a storytelling medium, *Ijo dan Emas* transforms a traditional narrative—once conveyed through folktales or *wayang kulit* performances—into a visually immersive experience accessible to digital-native audiences. This approach is vital, as folktales, despite their cultural and moral richness, often lose appeal when confined to textual or performative formats. Animation, however, revitalizes them by providing an interactive and emotionally resonant experience.

Furthermore, animation allows for the introduction of new interpretations of traditional myths. Through animation, these stories can be reconstructed without losing their cultural essence, enabling them to reach broader and younger audiences who may not engage with conventional folklore formats (Perera, 2025). In this context, *Ijo dan Emas* offers a transformative reinterpretation by humanizing Buto Ijo, a figure often perceived as the embodiment of evil. This perspective invites viewers to reflect more deeply on the moral and existential dimensions of life. Thus, animation transcends its role as entertainment and becomes an educational medium that encourages audiences—especially younger viewers—to understand the nuances within stories and to internalize more holistic values.

Through *Ijo dan Emas*, it becomes evident how myth can live through every animated image projected on the screen. Animation captures the essence of storytelling and delivers it in a form accessible to anyone, anywhere, and at any time. This accessibility greatly enhances the transmission of traditional myths to wider audiences without sacrificing their moral or cultural depth. Consequently, animation plays a pivotal role in sustaining the life of myth within the ever-evolving context of contemporary society.

## The Reconstruction Myth of Timun Mas in “Ijo dan Emas”

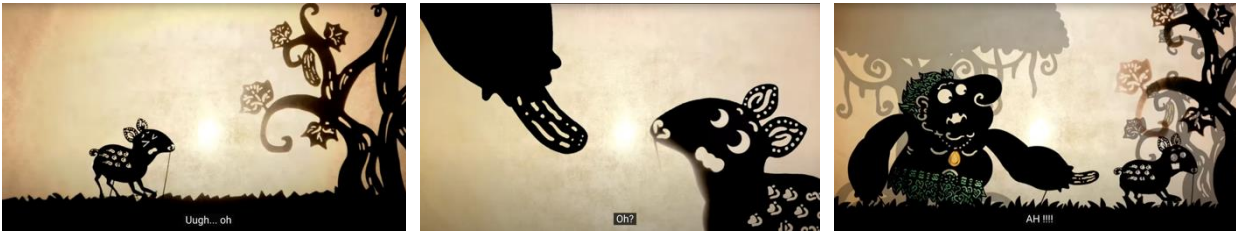


Figure 1. Scene 1 as opening, the Kancil run and Buto Ijo gave him a cucumber.

The film opens with the first scene, the familiar motif of fear and pursuit, as the trickster figure ‘Kancil’ runs from an unseen threat. The visual rhythm and sound design initially recall the archetypal image of the monstrous Buto Ijo from oral tradition (Haryanto, 2015). Yet, the immediate reversal occurs when Buto Ijo appears not as a predator but as a giver of life, handing a cucumber to Kancil. This inversion introduces Derrida’s (1978) notion of *différance*—meaning deferred and displaced—where the expected role of the monster collapses.

The green palette of Buto Ijo contrasts with the golden hue of the emerging cucumber plant, visually encoding *rwa bhineda*, the Balinese principle of duality and balance (Suardana, 2020). Instead of evil consuming good, *Ijo dan Emas* shows vitality, generosity, and loneliness in the “monster.” The act of offering fruit becomes a semiotic sign of peace, redefining the ogre’s body from threat to care.

When Buto Ijo fails to befriend Kancil and questions, “Am I really that scary?”, the animation establishes self-reflexivity. The monster becomes aware of its narrative position, a meta-commentary on how myth produces identity through repetition (Barthes, 1957). His lament—“When will I ever have a friend?”—reveals the human longing beneath the mythic surface. The ogre’s body, once a sign of abjection, now signifies emotional depth (Kristeva, 1982).



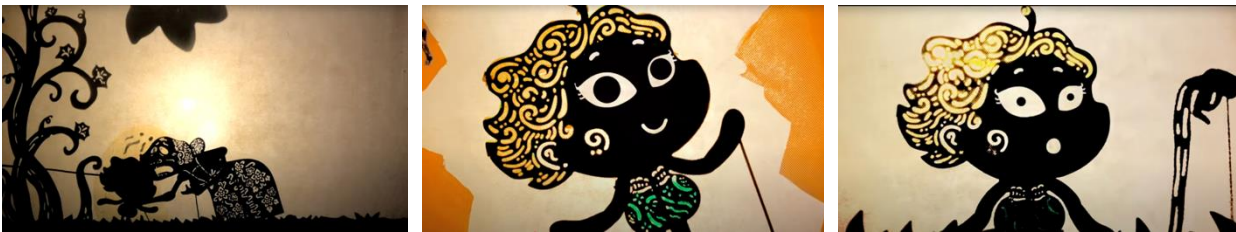
Figure 2. In scene 3 and 4 , Buto Ijo gave the Old Woman his only heirloom, the yellow talisman.



In scenes 3 and 4, Buto Ijo's gestures toward the human world mark a transition from isolation to participation. His attempt to craft toys from magical seeds mirrors the creative act of a demiurge—an artisan god who shapes reality. The children's terrified reaction reproduces the inherited social prejudice against the "Other." This echoes Lévi-Strauss's (1963) argument that myth structures social boundaries through opposition, here between human and nonhuman.

However, the narrative soon displaces this binary through the figure of the old woman (Mbok). Her prayer to the gods for a child introduces the divine-human communication typically found in mythic cosmogonies. When Buto Ijo sacrifices his only heirloom, the yellow talisman, to grant her wish, the myth undergoes ethical inversion. The traditional myth condemns Buto Ijo as a predator demanding the unborn child; the *aniwayang* version reimagines him as the very giver of Timun Mas's life.

Derrida's deconstruction of origin applies here: there is no pure beginning, only traces of difference that reshape meaning (Derrida, 1976). By gifting the talisman, Buto Ijo becomes both creator and absent father. The old woman's joyful exclamation—"Thank you, Dewa!"—cements the ambiguity: divinity and monstrosity merge. The ogre's voice, echoing "Wahai manusia...", re-signifies the monstrous as divine.



**Figure 3.** Scene 5 and 6 tell the birth of Timun Mas and the good relationship of Timun Mas and Buto Ijo.

When the old woman plants the magical seed, the miraculous growth of the cucumber and birth of Timun Mas evoke fertility myths found in agrarian societies (Eliade, 1963). The cinematic pacing—accelerated growth, swelling sound, radiant light—renders the scene as both sacred and humorous. Yet, the narrative refuses the moral polarity of the original story: the very monster who should threaten life is the one who enables creation.

Scenes 5 and 6 deepen the irony. Buto Ijo greets the child with tenderness, while the grandmother warns her to beware of him. The audience, however, already knows that the warning misreads reality. This dramatic irony serves as a semiotic reversal (Eco, 1979): the signifier of danger now signifies affection. The playful tone of Timun Mas's laughter toward Buto Ijo destabilizes the inherited schema of horror.

At the level of visual semiotics, Buto Ijo's massive green body contrasts with the delicate gold glow of Timun Mas's silhouette, forming a chromatic dialogue between nature (earth) and light (spirit). The green and gold are not antagonists but complementary symbols—the yin and yang cosmology (Santosa, 2019). Thus, the animation enacts visual deconstruction: color itself becomes the text that undoes mythic opposition.



Figure 4. Scene 7 and 8 are the misrecognition and the ethics of perception of Buto Ijo.

The seventh scene—where Buto Ijo rescues Timun Mas from falling off a cliff—visualizes the deconstruction of heroism. Traditionally, the heroine saves herself through divine aid; here, the supposed villain performs the saving act. Yet, the deed is unseen by the community. The grandmother, driven by fear, continues to frame Buto Ijo as a threat.

This misrecognition dramatizes what Barthes (1972) calls the naturalization of ideology: myths make cultural prejudices appear as natural truths. The villagers' belief in Buto Ijo's evilness persists because mythic narratives have sedimented moral certainty into visual expectation. Aniwayang's choice to show Buto Ijo through soft, rounded animation lines and slow, rhythmic motion undercuts the aggressive visual tropes of monsters in both Western and Indonesian visual cultures (Wells, 1998).

The offering of the terasi doll in Scene 8 functions as a semiotic bridge. The doll, made from fermented paste—a humble material—embodies transformation: decay becomes play, ugliness becomes joy. The child's acceptance of this toy represents a moment of symbolic reconciliation, a return to the tactile and the everyday as sites of empathy.



Figure 5. Scene 9 and 10 reflect the conflict and misunderstanding of Buto Ijo by the villagers

The emotional apex begins in Scene 9, where Buto Ijo sings outside the house, bridging distance through sound. Music here becomes what Derrida (1987) calls supplementarity—the excess that completes meaning. The ukulele, anachronistic in the mythic setting, symbolizes the intrusion of modernity and cross-cultural rhythm, a recurring theme in Indonesian contemporary animation (Setiawan, 2022).

The tender embrace between Timun Mas and Buto Ijo contrasts sharply with the grandmother's panicked scream, “Tolong! Ada Buto Ijo!” The word “Tolong” (help) reverses its function: a call for protection becomes a cause of violence. The crowd's collective hysteria in Scene 10 reflects René Girard's (1972) theory of the scapegoat mechanism—society's need to project its fear onto an innocent other. The villagers' attack on Buto Ijo mirrors ritualized violence that myth traditionally justifies to restore order. In deconstructive terms, Ijo dan Emas exposes this ritual logic, showing that the monster's expulsion is not natural but ideological. The film thus critiques moral absolutism embedded in traditional folklore, inviting viewers to question who defines “evil” and why.



**Figure 6.** Scene 11 and 12 reflect the healing and play between Buto Ijo and Timun Mas

The final act (Scenes 11-12) transforms exile into creativity. The interior of Buto Ijo's home, cluttered with magical pouches, is animated in cool tones of turquoise and moss green, evoking both melancholy and fertility. Timun Mas's intrusion, spilling seeds and chaos, recalls the mythic motif of curiosity and fall, yet the result is reconciliation, not punishment.

Their duet on the ukulele embodies semiotic playfulness (Barthes, 1977): music becomes a language of difference that transcends verbal misunderstanding. By singing together, child and monster produce a shared rhythm—a metaphor for cultural hybridity. This scene exemplifies what Bhabha (1994) calls the third space, where opposites merge to form new meanings beyond colonial or moral hierarchies.





Figure 7. Scene 13 reflects the return of Timun Mas and the change of villagers perception.

In the climactic thirteenth scene, the community once again confronts Buto Ijo. The grandmother's cry summons the villagers, reproducing the same pattern of misinterpretation. Yet, this time Timun Mas resists. She defies the moral authority of the elders, runs toward Buto Ijo, and sings with him in public. The ukulele, once private, becomes a communal instrument—transforming the scapegoat ritual into a musical reconciliation.



Figure 8. Final scene reflects the deconstruction of closure.

When Timun Mas calls out, “Pak!” (Father), the entire myth collapses and renews itself. This single utterance reassigns kinship, blurring human and monster, divine and mundane. The monster becomes parent, the child becomes redeemer. The villagers’ stunned silence signifies the moment of deconstruction: the binary of good/evil dissolves into relational ethics.

Through its inversion of roles, Ijo dan Emas dismantles the semiotic machinery that perpetuates “the monstrous other.” Derrida (1978) reminds us that presence is always haunted by absence; the good exists only in relation to its excluded opposite. By giving Buto Ijo an interior life, the film reveals the artificiality of this opposition. Unlike Western retellings where monsters are redeemed through rational explanation, Aniwayang’s Buto Ijo retains mythic ambiguity. He is divine and flawed, creator and outcast. The film thus articulates a posthuman ethics resonant with Indonesian cosmology, where all beings share interdependence (*tat twam asi—I am you, you are me*).

By translating wayang into digital motion, Aniwayang Studio participates in what Barker (2019) calls “the digital ritual of remembering.” Animation becomes a ritual medium through which myths are not merely retold but re-lived. The use of slow pacing, stylized gestures, and musical interludes mirrors the rhythm of live wayang performances, while digital compositing expands spatial depth and emotional range (Danarto, 2021). Thus, *Ijo dan Emas* bridges sacred narrative with everyday empathy. It does not desacralize myth but re-mythologizes the ordinary, suggesting that kindness and misunderstanding coexist within all beings. In doing so, the film aligns with Eliade’s (1963) view of myth as a living, renewable expression of cosmic order.

## Conclusion

*Ijo dan Emas* represents a profound cultural and aesthetic intervention into one of Java’s most enduring myths. Through a deconstructive and semiotic lens, the animation dismantles inherited binaries—good versus evil, human versus monster, divine versus profane—revealing them as constructs sustained by repetition. By reimagining Buto Ijo as compassionate and self-aware, Aniwayang Studio not only challenges moral essentialism but also reclaims myth as a flexible, dialogic text. The film’s visual language—green and gold hues, wayang perforations, rhythmic gestures—embodies an ethics of hybridity where tradition and innovation coexist. Ultimately, *Ijo dan Emas* exemplifies how Indonesian animators can engage mythology not as nostalgia but as living philosophy. It invites audiences to see that myths, like people, are capable of change—and that empathy is the most radical act of storytelling.

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