

When Stories Travel: A Review of Transcultural Film Adaptation

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ABSTRACT

Transcultural film adaptation has long been an obscure branch of adaptation studies, yet its history is equivalent to the film adaptation, and almost as long as cinema. Since its ongoing and growing adaptation activities are inconsistent with insufficient and limited theoretical research, this study reviews transcultural film adaptation research to bring fresh insights into the adaptation area. Based on adaptation research results, it alludes to related studies, such as cross-cultural communication and international communication, and defines transcultural film adaptation-related terms. It then reviews comparative case study method and fidelity studies to, on the one hand, summarize the research methodology and adaptation strategies and, on the other hand, respond to the two foundational questions surrounding adaptation raised by Leitch: the value of case study and the notion of fidelity. Instead of attacking fidelity or exaggerating the value of creativity, this paper contends that a reconciling relationship exists between fidelity and creativity in transcultural film adaptation, i.e. the creative transformation of culture.

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Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the exploration of transcultural film adaptation in adaptation studies and attempts to address two issues raised by Leitch in Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies. Moreover, it proposes the coordination of fidelity and creativity through the introduction of creative transformation as a new perspective in adaptation studies.

1. Introduction

Profit-driven motion picture studios have been racking their brains to figure out how to lure moviegoers into the cinema and willingly pull notes out of their pockets. More ideally, the viewer feels satisfied while paying for the film. In the late 20th century, The Walt Disney Company, adapting a ballad written during the Northern and Southern Dynasties of China (420-589) into an animated film known as *Mulan* (Cook & Bancroft,

1988), grossed \$300 million at the global box office, with \$90 million from the production budget. Although a legendary Chinese war-woman turns into a global celebrity thanks to Disney's powerful promotion (Hsiung, 2021), it has failed to resonate with the Chinese audience. More than the change in the theme and content of the story from filial piety and patriotism to female independence, Chinese public opinions express disappointment in the protagonist's appearance owing to the fact that in traditional Chinese aesthetics, Mulan, who is designed to have a collapsed nose, dark skin, and a strange face shape, deviates from people's imagination of Disney princesses with exquisite countenances. Then in 2020, when China is one of Disney's target markets (Phillips, 2022), the film studio remakes the 1998 version and employs Crystal Liu, an attractive Chinese actress, for the role of Mulan; however, the live-action product remains unapproved by audiences from the story's source country, even suffering from a worldwide critical and financial letdown (Tong, 2022). According to Mendelson (2020), a Box office analyst, it is one of the lowest-grossing Disney remakes since 2010's *Alice in Wonderland* launched the quasi-franchise. Global Times, the Chinese mainstream newspaper, attributed the film's failure to Hollywood filmmakers' self-righteous hodgepodge of Oriental elements (Song & Xie, 2020), which then leads to a discussion about transcultural film adaptation.

While adaptations extend beyond film adaptations, adaptation studies have origins in film adaptation studies, particularly novel-to-film research. Based on the dynamic relationship between original works and their adaptive outputs, Leitch (2017) categorizes adaptation studies into four phases (Table 1). As the first stage is termed Adaptation Studies 0.0, it loosely parallels the late nineteenth century to the 1950s. Academics of the period focus on critiquing the phenomenon of film adaptation, arguing that cinema's limitations to exhibit literature puts film adapters in a dilemma. On the one hand, film adaptation, especially the cinematisation of classic novels, is considered a "shameful way" (Bazin, 2005, p. 56). Some film critics and literary scholars worry that the abridgement or alteration of written works by the film may undermine the authority and artistry of literature, particularly canonical texts, and degrade the impression and status of masterpieces in the minds of readers. Furthermore, the adaptation's implication that the original was first and the film was second engendered resentment among newcomers to the cinema because it limited and devalued the directors' creativity. On the other hand, Film adapters require the authority of a masterwork to elevate the status of a film, as well as the ready-made stories and distinct characters in literature to convert a large number of readers and admirers into consumers for the purpose of making profits. While at the same time, recognizable narratives in the early years of cinema permitted directors to explore the camera language within the constraints of technology and the length of the film, without having to explain a great deal of the plot to the audience. Film adaptation did not attain a reasonable and legitimate status until the late 1950s as a result of the efforts of numerous scholars, including Bazin (2005), who defended adaptation in his book *What is Cinema?* (1958) by characterizing it as an act of borrowing and claiming that such behavior was a common practice in art history. Since then, Adaptation studies enter the 1.0 era, which is distinguished by *Novels into Film* (1957) and *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (1996). Adaptation research has become both a methodology and a field. Subsequently, *Adaptation: from Text to Screen, Screen to Text* (1999) marks the arrival of Adaptation Studies 2.0, a period in which the dominant theory is intertextuality, which in fact has its root in dialogue theory. Cutchins (2017) argues that the application of dialogic thought to adaptation research has extensive ramifications. Bakhtin (1981) explains the interaction and dialogue of human beings from a philosophical and

aesthetic perspective, contending that individuals are always valued in their connections with other people, the world, history, and culture, while engaging in dialogue. When referring to a work as an adaptation, we assume that there is also a source text and an obvious and complex relationship between them. Kristeva, drawing on dialogue theory, introduces the term 'intertextuality' and asserts that every text is an inter text of other texts (Alfaro, 1996). In general, intertextuality challenges conventional perspectives on the inherent characteristics of literary texts. It highlights the intricate web of connections that a particular text has with external factors, encompassing both its creation and reception. This departure from the traditional understanding of a definitive, explicit, and self-contained text expands the boundaries of interpretation, creating a vast and delicate realm of possibilities, which also provides significant meanings and values to the adaptation. Accordingly, the scope of Adaptation Studies 3.0 has expanded to include a variety of adaptation activities. While embracing digital technology, academics seek advancements that go beyond the intertextuality-constructed theoretical framework and typical comparative textual analysis method. In addition to methodological innovations, the content of adaptation evolves to consist of literature-to-costume (Choe, 2020), literature-to-television drama (Ballinger, 2021), theatre-to-film (Jeon, 2022), literature-to-Lego (Muchnick, 2023), and opera-to-ballet (Qi, 2023), among others.

Table 1: The Four Phases of Adaptation Studies

Title	Period	Features
Adaptation Studies 0.0	Late 19th to 1950s	The possibility and advisability of turning novels or plays into movies
Adaptation Studies 1.0	1957-1998	Adaptation Studies as a methodology and a field
Adaptation Studies 2.0	1999-2010	Leading principle: intertextuality
Adaptation Studies 3.0	2011-	An embrace of digital technologies An increasing pervasive suspicion of the limits of intertextuality as a methodological framework

Source: Leitch (2017)

Transcultural film adaptations have a history equal to film adaptations and almost as long as films. According to Desmond and Hawkes (2015), the earliest film based on a literary work was *The Death of Nancy Sykes*, which adapted an episode from the English novel *Oliver Twist* and was released in 1897, just two years after the internationally accepted date of cinema's birth. However, transcultural film adaptations have not received the attention they deserve in adaptation studies. Oxford University Press released *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies* which brings together forty original essays by leading adaptation scholars and demonstrates the history of adaptation studies, the current state of adaptation studies, and predictions for the future development of adaptation studies through seven sections: the history of adaptation studies, classic adaptations, popular adaptations, genre adaptations, adaptations and intertextuality, interdisciplinary adaptations, and professing adaptations. This provides a broader perspective and cognitive framework for adaptation research, but it should be acknowledged that the importance of transcultural adaptation has been slightly neglected, with the exception of an article by Stam (2017), *Revisionist Adaptation: Transtextuality, Cross-Cultural Dialogism, and Performative Infidelities*, in which he states that cross-cultural adaptations can breathe new life into their source texts by making provocative adjustments to their setting, genre, casting, or production processes.

Inadequate research has also contributed to the blurring and confusion of related concepts, such as the distinction between transcultural adaptation and cross-cultural adaptation.

Whilst the phenomenon of transcultural film adaptation goes hand in hand with film adaptations, its study has existed from the very beginning as an ambiguous and vague part of the study of adaptation. It was only when [Hutchen \(2006\)](#) combined forms, adapters, audiences and contexts and constructed a framework for adaptation theory that transcultural adaptation as part of contextual studies was theorized and attempted to address the *when* and *where* of adaptation. Later, [Della \(2012\)](#) sees transcultural adaptation as a transformative encounter between fiction and film and emphasizes the transformative hermeneutical power of the adaptive encounter. Any adaptation involves, to a greater or lesser extent, the concepts of trans-temporality, trans-territorial or geographic boundaries, trans-media, and the resulting cultural conflicts and fusions depicted in transcultural film adaptations. Compared to other traditional adaptations, they all undergo a complex process from the original work to the adapted product, and their differences appear to be limited to the degree of change, which is why it is difficult for transcultural film adaptations to find an accurate position in adaptation studies. In actuality, it has entered a multicultural and multilingual marketplace, where a lot of quotations, references, echoes, and different cultural languages bring the idea of interpretive plurality into the making and negotiation of meaning ([Barthes, 1978](#)). Moreover, the changes that occur in transcultural film adaptations can be more dramatic, and adapters need to consider a wider range of content, including cultural traditions, customs, film policies, and audience preferences in at least two countries. In addition, it has immense commercial value, as evidenced by Hollywood's worldwide search for stories. Consequently, transcultural film adaptations can be viewed as a transnational flux of cultural capital, as the origins of the stories also benefit financially from the advertising campaigns of the film giants. If the novelty triggered by the exoticism is a major factor influencing filmgoers' exposure to transcultural films, when this freshness wears off, it is the culture that really determines the movie's longevity and sustained popularity on the basis that the original work, the adaptation, and the adaptation process all exist in contexts that are constructed by time and place, society, and culture ([Hutcheon & O'Flynn, 2013](#)). Put differently, all the changes a story undergoes when it comes from its creative context to its adaptive context can be explained in terms of culture.

Given the disparity between the increasing prevalence of transcultural adaptation in real-world contexts, driven by its significant economic prospects, and insufficient and limited theoretical research, this study focuses specifically on transcultural film adaptation as a means to review existing research and offer novel insights into the adaptation area. Due to the limited quantity of research, this study first clarifies terms similar to transcultural film adaptation, based on adaptation research and film adaptation research, with reference to related studies such as cross-cultural communication and international communication. It then sorts comparative textual analysis and fidelity studies to summarize the research methodology and adaptation strategies and then to respond from a transcultural perspective to the two fundamental questions in adaptation raised by [Leitch \(2017\)](#) in *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, namely the value of case study and the notion of fidelity. Finally, it concludes that the emphasis in transcultural film adaptation should be placed on the creative transformation of culture as a coordinated relationship between fidelity and creativity, rather than disparaging fidelity or exaggerating the value of creativity.

2. Cross-, Multi-, Inter-, And Transcultural Film Adaptation

The delineation of transcultural film adaptation begins by tracing back to the definition of adaptation. According to [Cambridge Dictionary \(n.d.\)](#), there are three definitions of adaptation. The first definition is 'the process of changing to suit different conditions', which clarifies the nature and purpose of adaptation; while the second definition points out that adaptation is 'the process in which a living thing changes slightly over time to be able to continue to exist' from the biological standpoint, which is consistent with Darwin's theory of evolution, demonstrating that species are variable and the fittest survive. Both of the aforementioned definitions emphasise adaptation as a changing process, and a synthesis of the two can be seen in [Cahir's \(2006\)](#) definition, where she posits that adaptation is the placement of an entity in a new environment, where the original entity may inevitably change in order to adapt to the new environment. The third dictionary definition is 'a film, book, or play adapted from another film, book, or play'. While the first two definitions underline the procedure, the third definition aims at outcomes. Similarly, [Hutcheon \(2006\)](#) discusses adaptation as both a process and a final product. Beyond the meanings of process and results, [Corrigan \(2017\)](#) also takes into account the reception process, i.e. an understanding of the adaptation from the audience's perspective, defining it as a reception act in which the reading or viewing of that material is intentionally adapted as a specific sort of enjoyment and comprehension.

Considering the preceding definitions, film adaptation can also be understood in three-fold. First, film adaptation as a process refers to the total or partial adaptation of a work into a film, marking the transformation from the source text or text being adapted to the adapted text. When viewed as a line segment, the process of film adaptation ends with the film, but it begins with a variety of materials and sources, such as plays, novels, operas, dance shows, computer games, songs, and even films; the transformation from these diverse sources to the film is complex, involving variation in content, themes, cultures, and media types. Next, film adaptation as a product, namely, the film is also the focus of scholars' attention. [Cardwell \(2002\)](#) observes that case studies of classic or representative films and comparative analyses of literary texts and films are the most common research methods employed by scholars of film adaptation. [Perdikaki \(2018\)](#) uses *The Great Gatsby* to propose film adaptation as an interface between creative translation and cultural transformation, and he argues that adaptation has been considered a process that can cast light on significant social, cultural, and ideological questions. Finally, as film adaptation serves as an act of reception, the film, which was originally located at the endpoint, has to be moved forward to the midpoint, while the real destination is the film-goers. In other words, adaptations are not complete until the raw material containing the story is transformed into a film by adapters employing adaptation strategies, and then only when the film is received by the audience via distribution and screening, outlining the significance of the audience.

In Adaptation Studies 2.0, intertextuality became the guiding principle of adaptation studies benefiting from the work of [Stam and Raengo \(2004\)](#), [Cartmell and Whelehan \(1999\)](#), who continued to delve deeper into the study of literary and cinematic intertextuality building on the foundations of literary and semiotic scholars. Nevertheless, there are those scholars who have turned to explore new perspectives and approaches, contributing to Adaptation Studies 3.0, among them [Raw \(2012\)](#), who, influenced by globalization and attentive to the phenomenon of transculturation, advocates the consideration of texts from multiple cultural perspectives as a way to broaden the viewpoints and relevance of text-based studies. In describing adaptation

across cultures, however, various scholars have used different terms, which include intercultural, transcultural, multicultural, and cross-cultural. These concepts, while sharing similarities, such as they all denote moving, at a distance and across (Marotta, 2014), and are in some cases interchangeable (Brink 1994). But there are also discrepancies, and identifying these subtle differences is critical and meaningful for transcultural adaptation studies.

Stewart and Munro (2020) use the term 'intercultural screen adaptation' to examine the means by which film and television adaptations interact with the cultural, social, and political environments of their country of production in transnational and post-national contexts, taking a British/Western perspective to analyse screen adaptations across the UK, Europe, South America, and Asia, which include British films as well as audiovisual productions based on British literature, but the study prefers to explore the impact of transnational contexts on British productions. Following Welsch (1999), intercultural attempts to reduce tensions between cultures and encourage mutual cultural understanding and awareness by favoring exchanges between different cultures within a country. As Ting-Toomey and Chung (2021) establish a three-part framework for intercultural communication by examining what is involved in communication between people from dissimilar cultures, analyzing what can happen emotionally, linguistically, and pragmatically when natives meet people with foreign cultural backgrounds, including conflicts, and suggesting solutions to cultural conflicts. In their view, the purpose of intercultural studies is to develop flexible and effective intercultural communicators. Also, Eyo et al. (2021) investigate the function of intercultural communication in building relationships and reducing conflict within a multi-ethnic community. Multicultural is defined as "of or relating to a society consisting of a number of cultural groups, esp. in which the distinctive cultural identity of each group is maintained" (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). Thus, parallel to intercultural, it is also used to understand intra-national rather than transnational, and furthermore, it underscores the retention of distinctive cultural identities within a collective, so that there is no discussion about absence and compromise due to the collision of cultures and therefore no focus on interaction and exchange between different cultures. The term 'cross-cultural' places more emphasis on comparing and contrasting one cultural group with another (Gudykunst, 2003), and therefore most cross-cultural communication studies are comparative research. Comparing the cultural contexts of message senders and message receivers, Aririguzoh (2022) concludes that culture-literate and skilled communicators can overcome or reduce cross-cultural communication barriers, which typically manifest as misconstruction, misperception, misunderstanding, and misvaluation of messages due to cultural differences between message senders and receivers. In comparison, transcultural is broader in scope, encompassing both the comparative aspects of diverse cultures and the newness that emerges from their encounters. It refers to the "beliefs in and definitions of, concepts that transcend cultural boundaries" (Brink, 1994, p. 344), which is a way of connecting and integrating different cultural forms of cultural hybridization, and it reinforces the idea that exchanges between different cultures produce new cultures or things. Those film adaptations that transcend cultures accommodate the cultures of at least two countries or regions; therefore, comparison, contrast, and fusion exchanges between cultures are essential, given that the film's audience is global and that, in addition to the audience from the country of the adaptation and the audience of the source text, audiences from other countries will also view the adaptation. Therefore, this study leans more towards the notion that the encounter of different cultures will produce a new culture that is effortlessly understood and accepted by audiences worldwide. Moreover, the phrase

'transcultural adaptation' has been used by several adaptation scholars such as [Hutcheon and O'Flynn \(2013\)](#), [Stephens and Lee \(2018\)](#), [O'Connell\(2020\)](#), and [Pereira \(2021\)](#).

3. Controversy Over the Comparative Case Study

During the first decade of the 21st century, [Murray \(2008\)](#) discerns that the adaptation study, which is in the right discipline, at the right time, is being plagued by an outdated methodology, which [Ray \(2000\)](#) identifies as the comparative case study between paper texts and screen texts, and thus, after reviewing the findings of more than forty adaptation scholars from the 1950s to the early 2000s, she argues that most adaptation scholars have been engaged in a repetitive exercise of source text-adaptation products, particularly book-film pairings and that the similarities and differences that emerge from such practice are not enlightening, she then introduces a new approach to adaptation studies by incorporating political economy, cultural theory, and history of the book, then brings up an industry-centric adaptation model. Subsequently, [Meikle \(2013\)](#) explores the material culture of the adaptation process. Despite the recognition of insightful researchers at the beginning of the 20th century that research on adaptation was characterized by an abundance of comparative case studies, this traditional research approach persists in the examination of contemporary adaptation discoveries. The latest *Adaptation*, a prominent scholarly publication focused on investigating novel methodologies and documenting current advancements in the domain of adaptation, keeps on comprising a collection of case studies.

There is, indeed, a rationale for the survival of case studies based on comparative textual analyses. In *Adaptation Studies 1.0*, that is, when it was a methodology and a field, [Bluestone \(1957\)](#) clearly indicates the problems faced by film adapters in adapting novels on the basis of an extensive examination of theories and principles related to novels and films, then proves his theory through six film adaptations, including *The Informer*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Ox-Bow Incident*, and *Madame Bovary*, composing a seminal work in adaptation studies. Nearly half a century later, the qualitative case study is still being applied as the main methodology by [McFarlane \(1996\)](#) in fiction-to-film research, even though he has acknowledged that there are those who complain about a waste of time in comparing films and novels. As intertextuality takes over as the predominant tenet of *Adaptation Studies 2.0*, comparative case studies are also given a more central place. According to the definition of adaptation, either as a process or as an outcome, it involves at least two concepts, i.e., the original work before adaptation and the product after adaptation. [Stam \(2000\)](#) borrows from dialogical theory to regard adaptation as a dialogue in which both sides of the dialogue are the original text and the adapted work, and therefore inevitably entails a comparison between them. Such a dialogue thought has a great influence on later adaptation studies. While an increasing variety of disciplines and their theories, such as economics, political science, phenomenology, and semiotics, were being introduced into adaptation studies, which shook the authority of intertextuality, adaptation scholars began to explore new methodologies beyond the comparative case study. The value of case studies was also included by [Leitch \(2017\)](#) as one of the foundational questions to be addressed in adaptation studies. For one, after almost 70 years of development, there is an urgent need to introduce new methods and theories aimed at expanding the boundaries of adaptation studies and promoting it as an independent discipline rather than just an intersection of two separate disciplines, such as literature and film; for another, the case study accompanied by comparative textual

analysis is still at work as the classic methodology of adaptation studies. These two strains of thought around adaptation studies are, in fact, parallel. Exploring new approaches in the field of adaptation is not in conflict with using case studies/comparative textual analyses to delve into new or under-explored terrains of adaptation studies, such as transcultural film adaptations.

Together with the foregoing delineation of transcultural, it is derived that the purpose of the study of transcultural film adaptation is to explore what is new when different cultures meet, and this process of exploration itself involves comparisons and contrasts between various cultures, which in turn rests on the source text and the adapted product and thus inevitably involves comparisons between the original work and the film. [Uribe-Jongbloed and Espinosa-Medina \(2014\)](#), in a review of publications about the flow of audiovisual cultural products in the globalization context from 1976 to 2013, sorted out the concepts including cultural proximity ([Straubhaar, 1991](#)), cultural share ability ([La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005](#)), cultural discount ([Hoskins & Mirus, 1998](#)), cultural lacunae, and cultural universality ([Rohn, 2011](#)), and provided a cultural transduction framework that consists of markets, products, people, and places for comparative research. The new framework was later used to analyse video games through comparative case studies ([Uribe-Jongbloed et al., 2016](#)), as well as the transcultural adaptation of Don Camillo from bestseller to film to television series ([Uribe-Jongbloed & Aristizába, 2019](#)).

4. Adaptation Anxiety: Fidelity or Creativity

Fidelity, as it pertains to the relationship between the source text and the adapted product, has been extensively debated and appears in virtually every authoritative work on adaptation studies. Nevertheless, [Bailey \(2019\)](#) concludes that related debates have involved a low level of semantic jousting. Indisputably, fidelity in adaptation studies has resilience, or “puzzling resilience” ([Hodgkins, 2013, p.7](#)), as it has subsisted within the anti-fidelity arguments contributed to by numerous scholars such as [Andrew \(1984\)](#) and is still under discussion today ([McClain, 2023](#)), moreover, as well as in case studies, [Leitch \(2003\)](#) included it as one of the foundational issues of adaptation studies, although he has also dismissed related debates as being hopelessly fallacious and fruitless ([Leitch, 2008](#)). The consideration of fidelity is, factually, still in play, especially when exploring some of the emerging areas of adaptation research, such as adaptation in the digital age ([Cieślakm, 2021](#)), or not-yet-fully excavated older fields, such as transcultural film adaptation.

Taking fidelity as defined by [Oxford English Dictionary \(n.d.\)](#), “the quality of being accurate”, in the field of film adaptation, it refers to the film’s infinite proximity to the original, with the aim of judging the fidelity of the adapted product to the original ([Hermansson, 2015](#)) to evaluate the cinematic quality. It is true that in the early stages of film adaptation, film directors, screenwriters, critics, and audiences used the high fidelity to the original as a measure of the filmic success, observing in book-film comparisons whether the latter was an exact copy or a restoration of the former and then drawing conclusions about the product’s popularity. However, as early as the 1950s, [Bluestone \(1957\)](#) indicated that when confronted with an adaptation, filmmakers ostensibly discuss the adaptation’s fidelity to the source text but are actually concerned with the success of the work. When a film adaptation receives high box office receipts or public acclaim from the audience, restoration of the original work is neglected. In addition, this view, which equates fidelity with replication or reproduction, has been

universally criticized by industry and academia. According to [Hutcheo's \(2006\)](#) study on the motivations for adaptation, which include economic incentives, legal constraints, cultural capital, and personal and policy drivers that rarely involve fidelity, it is unlikely that the primary purpose of adapting a work for filmmakers is to faithfully recreate the original. Regarding adaptation researchers, they have provided plausible justifications for the notion that the transformation from the original to the film cannot be avoided. To begin with, these variations stem from a shift in medium. In the case of novel-based film, for instance, literature is a written or printed text while film is an audio-visual text, and printed text is materially static and consists primarily of the symbolic signs of language, whereas film is materially kinetic and temporal and incorporates the symbolic signs of auditory text with the predominately iconic signs of images ([Bruhn et al., 2021](#)). Because of the differences in the ways in which stories are told and conveyed through various media, when a story moves from the paper medium to the field of audiovisual media, it has to undergo certain modifications in order to adjust to the new environment. Then, it goes through contextual changes, especially in transcultural film adaptations, which cross not only temporal but also geographical boundaries. There are four elements or stages to this journey, drawing on [Said's \(1983\)](#) travel theory: an initial set of circumstances, i.e., the origin of the story; a traversal distance in which the story acquires new possibilities; a set of conditions of acceptance (or impedance); and the final transformation of that story in a new time and place. Furthermore, the transformation brought about by the adaptation process was predicated on the artistic quality of cinema. In 1911, [Canudo \(2021\)](#) published *The Birth of the Sixth Art* (later renamed *The Birth of the Seventh Art*), in which he asserted that film, as an independent and comprehensive art, combined the characteristics of the six arts of architecture, music, painting, sculpture, dance, and poetry (literature) and also confirmed its creative nature as an art that possesses the fundamental rules of creation and distinctive creative methods. And the creative qualities of film adaptation are reflected in the film's alterations to the source material.

Inasmuch as creative changes are inevitable during the adaptation process, why can't the practice-academic circle abandon fidelity? Existing research findings also provide the answer, which is audience or market ([Hu & Liu, 2020](#)). The target audience for films based on literature can be roughly divided into three groups: ardent admirers of the original, readers who have read the fiction but have no particular attachment to it, and average moviegoers who have not read the book. [Boozer \(2008\)](#) states that producers actively promote the adaptation of bestsellers to films for marketing and profit motives, which means that the first two categories of audience have a greater market share for film adaptations. When a reader is enjoying a film based on a novel they have read as a film viewer, the scenes in the film, especially the classic scenes, evoke memories of their reading of the novel, i.e., the images the viewer sees are intertextually linked to the (literal) memories in their mind, and at this point, they make judgement about the film's fidelity to the novel, according to [Cartmell and Whelehan \(2005\)](#), which is a knee-jerk reaction. Those who have not read the source material perceive the adapted product to be an original film, which may prompt them to read the source material and, as a result, make unintentional assumptions about fidelity. There is limited research on the proportion of fidelity in audience evaluation and whether or not fidelity can be a determining factor for moviegoers when evaluating a film adaptation. The box office performance of a film adaptation, followed by reviews and scores from critics and the general public on social media platforms such as IMDb, is the most intuitive means of determining its reception in the marketplace. However, research involving the reception process must be brought to the attention of adaptation research, particularly that of

transcultural film adaptations, because audience feedback and market responses can directly influence the filmmakers' subsequent productions. In order for filmgoers to have a pleasurable viewing experience, adapters must incorporate audience satisfaction into their adaptation strategies and do their best to meet audience expectations (Hutcheon & O'Flynn, 2013). In the context of transcultural film adaptation, which encompasses a broader and more intricate film audience, often spanning multiple countries, it becomes imperative to consider the diverse production strategies employed by studios. Particularly in the case of Hollywood, where concerted efforts are made to cater to a global audience (Rendell, 2021), it becomes essential to simultaneously address the requirements of both the audience in the story's place of origin and the film's place of production. This entails taking into account the expectations of fans in the location where the narrative is conceived with regard to faithfulness to the original material.

5. Creative Transformation: A New Perspective of Transcultural Film Adaptation

In the early stages of adaptation studies, scholars led by Bluestone (1957) and Krakauer (1997) justified and legitimized the creative properties of the adaptation process by contending that film and literature are distinct mediums. Several academics have since responded to the notion that change is inevitable from social, historical, and transnational perspectives. The theoretical framework described thus far views cinematic adaptation as not solely dependent on the purported meaning of an original text but rather as an attempt to actualize that text by imbuing it with new significance through 'thoughtful mediation with contemporary life' (Gadamer, 1995). Adaptation inherently involves rewriting because the source material is reformatted and repurposed for a new audience, and as sociocultural and historical circumstances evolve, the need for new interpretations arises. As noted by Schwanebeck (2020), transcultural film adaptations of well-known literary properties decontextualize the source by relocating it across cultural borders, a process that is often accompanied by a temporal update, in order to bring the material closer to the intended audience. Pereira (2021) concluded that when stories are retold in completely different contexts, a process of transformation occurs that emphasizes differences over similarities. The objective of transformation is to adapt to the new context and audience in order to assure survival and even thrive. In fact, there is a need to adapt stories in transcultural film adaptations not only to meet the requirements of the new context but also to comply with the expectations of the old context; thus, the seemingly obsolete fidelity is still relevant to explore in the context of fan culture, which aims to investigate the role played by fidelity in readers' evaluations and thus contributes to filmmakers with devising adaptation strategies. Given the continued value of fidelity and creativity in adaptation studies, it would be preferable to combine them and bring them to a state of balance, i.e., creative transformation, rather than engage in interminable debates between the two.

Regarding transcultural film adaptation, creative transformation can be viewed as a dialogue between the source text and the film that points out the process of creatively and faithfully adapting the source material to the film. The American scholar Lin (2011) first theorized or formally introduced 'creative transformation' in his 1972 article *Radicalconoclasm in the May Fourth Period and Future of Chinese Liberalism*, and put forward the creative transformation of tradition on the basis of creative reform theory, that is, to transform the symbols and value systems of some Chinese cultural traditions so that the transformed items will be turned into seeds conducive to change while

continuing to maintain a cultural identity in the transformational process, where the seeds conducive to change are similar to cultural genes, or memes proposed by Dawkins (1976). This essay, which seeks to refute the notion that there has been a full-blown counter-traditional culture in Chinese society since the May Fourth, was later collected by Schwartz (2020) in *Reflections on the May Fourth Movement*. In the transcultural film adaptation, one of the adapter's responsibilities is to unearth distinctive, variable symbols and value systems from the original work, ensuring that when they penetrate the film, they are recognizable to both readers of the original work and filmgoers in the new context, which is the secret to the adaptation's success,

What is clear is that certain features of novelistic expression must be retained in order to guarantee a 'successful' adaptation, but clearly the markers of success vary depending largely on which features of the literary narrative are deemed essential to a reproduction of its core meaning. (Whelehan, 2013, p.7)

From a cultural perspective, Stephens and Lee (2018) note that a film's local or regional success may rely heavily on its representation of familiar cultural elements, the local development of recognizable genres, and the representation of local narrative forms and conventions. Lin's work inspires researchers to investigate how the culture present in the source text, particularly the traditional culture, has changed after the transcultural film adaptation, and then to explain the reasons for these changes and provide recommendations for the next adaptation activity, forming a *what, why, and how* path of research on adaptation.

Unlike the Oriental perspective, Garcia (2005), in his third book, *Creative Transformation* first published in 1991, describes creative transformation as a new theory that links biological evolution, individual creativity, and quantum mechanics, representing a concept that has developed since 1983. After reviewing human evolution, he advocates creativity as the driving force of human action and as a process with the potential for perpetual growth and suggests that only the innovator can evolve forever, which echoes adaptation and is consistent with Darwin's theory of the evolution of species as well as with the idea of natural selection. Beyond the existential purpose, he believes that the ultimate goal of creative transformation is to produce a collective creative intelligence that is greater than the sum of its parts and in which each individual is more creative than if they were alone. Furthermore, he specifies four steps for creative transformation in order to tap into creativity to the greatest extent possible: (1) ethical commitment; (2) love of others; (3) conquest of fear; and (4) autopoiesis. As creative transformation moves from the domain of human intellect to the realm of transcultural film adaptation, this framework requires modification. Adapters need to initially respect the original (equivalent to ethical commitment). Respect does not mean leaving the original unchanged; rather, it is about adapting it with high quality, which requires adapters to know as much as possible about the original's content, themes, structure, and contextual information, such as the author, the context in which it was created, etc. For creative transformation to occur, Udall (1996) states that designers must have the opportunity to transform what they know in order to discover what they do not know and do not know that they know. Adapters are also required to respect the culture in the source text and the audience from the location where the original work was created, which is one of the target audiences for film adaptations, and to meet the needs of the audience from the location where the film was created (equivalent to love of others). Then there is the courage to adapt, which is the same as conquering fear. Based on their understanding of

the original film, adapters combine the culture of their own country, the characteristics of the times, and the social and cultural needs of the target audience to make creative adaptations that are at the same time reasonable and not detached from the original reader's perceptions. Finally, there is the completion of the transcultural product, which equals autopoiesis.

6. Conclusion

The story can be used as raw material for a journey across time, space, and geographical boundaries, in which the culture contained in the story itself and the culture of the destination (the context of filmmaking) meet, dialogue, and generate something new, which makes the original story take on a new meaning while being widely disseminated and advances the original compositional context and the cinematic production context in an economic and cultural win-win relationship, which together constitute the core value of transcultural film adaptation. Whereas transcultural adaptation has historically occurred alongside film adaptation, its theoretical research has not matched the extensive practice in terms of volume and cutting-edge and has primarily been discussed as a particular book chapter in the collected works of adaptation studies, with [Hutcheon's \(2006\)](#) discussion of the value of contextual studies serving as a major foundation for future transcultural studies. On the other hand, [Murray's \(2008\)](#) shift from comparative case study methodology to the exploration of the material culture of the adaptation process, as called for by scholars such as [Ray \(2000\)](#). And [Uribe-Jongbloed et al. \(2014\)](#), who constructed a cultural transduction framework for analyzing the trade flows of audiovisual products across the globe in an effort to extract commercial value from culture, are more inclined to transnational adaptation studies. To distinguish itself from transnational film adaptation, this study argues for examining transcultural film adaptation through the lens of cultural transformation that can be used as an adaptation strategy, thereby reconciling one of the debates about fidelity and creativity in adaptation studies.

The study of transcultural film adaptation focuses on the intricate and dramatic story-to-film transformation. In addition to examining the *what*, *why*, and *how* of storytelling journeys through still-functioning comparative case studies from a cultural perspective, there are at least two other directions that merit in-depth investigation. Depending on the identity of the researcher, i.e., whether the scholar is at the origin of the story, the production of the film, or a third party, it can be broadly classified as either indigenous adaptation (the inflow of stories) or migratory adaptation (the outflow of stories), and clearly defining them is beneficial for both theory and practice. The second direction is an investigation of the target audience. If a producer's goal is to screen a film on as large a scale as possible and to attract as many filmgoers as possible, he or she must at least understand the preferences of the audience in the place where the original work was created and in the place where the film is screened and devise adaptation strategies to satisfy them.

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The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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