

Translating Myth to Film: Chinese Mythological Novel Adaptations and Intercultural Communication

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Abstract

This paper explores the use of film adaptation of Chinese mythological novels in intercultural communication, focusing especially on the fidelity of adaptation and image creation of cultural elements influence cultural knowledge and cultural appreciation. It also examines the mediating role of cultural interpretation of the audience and the moderating effect of access to language. A mixed-method design was employed, including a systematic survey of 321 overseas viewers alongside 12 semi-structured open-ended qualitative interviews. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used for testing the proposed relationships, both mediation and moderation effects in the quantitative stage. Qualitative step made thematic analysis to explore interpretations by the audience and provided extensive information with the perception of viewers on the topics of adaptation fidelity and cultural symbolism. Quantitative results prove that both adaptation fidelity and visual representation favorably enhance the culture understanding and enjoyment, cultural interpretation of the audience can be viewed as a key mediator. The available language also intensified the interpretation and cultural results association. The qualitative evidence indicated participants perceived symbolic authenticity and quality of translation to be crucial to how they perceive culture and explain the mechanism behind the statistical correlation. The integration of survey evidence and audience narratives pits this research of an adaption theory and intercultural communication hosting film adaptations as feedback cultural bridges influenced by fidelity and symbolism and the interpretation and accessibility. Practically, it emphasizes the value of culturally sensitive modes of adaptation, translation of high quality and audience participation of intercultural effects of mythological narratives in film.

Keywords: film adaptations, Chinese mythology, intercultural communication, cultural interpretation, language accessibility

1. Introduction

Film adaptation of mythological novels has become a major area of cultural and media studies, offering insights into how classical stories are revisited and reproduced for national and global audiences (Ng, 2023).

Empirical studies in this area have made the issues of fidelity relative to adaptation and cultural symbolism relevant to informing audience reception. To illustrate this, the analysis of the international popularity of *Monkey King: Hero Is Back* has found that the movie has been enjoyed by the audience to follow the mythological patterns, at the same time, enjoying the visual narration that is placed in the modernity (Yang, 2023). Likewise, the research on *Ne Zha* has revealed that the foreign viewers expressed a better level of cultural comprehension with regard to being exposed to realistic depictions of Taoist cosmology and Confucian ideology, mediated via the symbolism of visual abundance (Fang et al., 2025). Alongside faithfulness, it has been demonstrated that audience interpretation is a very important part of intercultural communication because mythological symbols and stories are understood by the viewers through the prism of their own cultures (Li, 2025). In the meantime, studies on audiovisual translation suggest that the quality of subtitling and dubbing has a direct effect on the possibility of the viewers to adequately grasp and enjoy foreign cultural features (Lu, 2025).

Despite these contributions, there are gaps in the body of literature that exists. A lot of the research has focused on fidelity, or visual representation as a concept without necessarily considering how the two can interact with each other and how audiences interpret them (Sihombing & Al'ula, 2023). Research has been inclined to measure fidelity in the evaluative perspective- whether the adaptations are faithful or not and not looking at how fidelity functions as a basis of

audience interpretation and further cultural interpretation (Alexandra, 2025). The other major gap is the modifying factor of language accessibility. Although it has been recognized within the body of research that subtitles and dubbing do indeed affect audience comprehension, there has been a lack of empirical interest on the extent to which the quality of translation moderates the connection between audience interpretation and cultural appreciation and understanding (Strehlenert et al., 2024). It is especially true in the case of Chinese mythological adaptations, where the idioms, allegories, and references to the Chinese culture play the central role, and the quality of translation becomes the key determinant of the successful cultural transmission (X. Li, 2024).

To address these gaps, the present study adopts a mixed-methods approach. Quantitatively, it examines the relationships among fidelity of adaptation, visual representation, cultural understanding, and cultural appreciation, incorporating audience cultural interpretation as a mediator and language accessibility as a moderator. Qualitatively, it complements the survey with 12 in-depth interviews, allowing for exploration of audience narratives, emotional responses, and interpretive strategies that cannot be fully captured through survey items alone. By combining these methods, the study will provide both breadth and depth: survey data establishes the general patterns of intercultural reception, while interviews offer rich insights into the mechanisms and meanings underlying those patterns.

Accordingly, the objectives of this research are:

1. To examine how adaptation fidelity influences cultural understanding and appreciation.
2. To analyze how visual symbolism shapes these intercultural outcomes.
3. To investigate the mediating role of audience cultural interpretation.
4. To evaluate how language accessibility moderates the link between interpretation and cultural appreciation.
5. To explore through qualitative interviews how international audiences interpret and emotionally respond to Chinese mythological adaptations.

Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how mythological adaptations operate as intercultural bridges, revealing how fidelity, symbolism, and translation intersect to shape global engagement with Chinese cultural narratives, thus filling the gaps in the existing literature (Hasson et al., 2023). It also adds to the study of intercultural communication by illustrating the way in which films have been used as mediating spaces of cultural knowledge and appreciation, which is shaped by the active participation of audiences in the interpretation and decoding of narratives (Liu, 2023).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Fidelity of Adaptation and Cultural Understanding

Fidelity has been established as an important consideration in understanding the way audiences acquire meaning and cultural information in a screen text in adaptation studies (Alexandra, 2025). A loyal adaptation, one that preserves storyline, cultural iconography and subject matter, allows viewers especially ones who are not knowledgeable with the original work to get a clearer understanding of the cultural construct within the narrative (Shelton et al., 2023). Empirical studies have shown that the Chinese mythological texts such as *Journey to the West* and *Ne Zha* can be adapted to help achieve intercultural understanding by maintaining mythological archetypes and cosmological values in their forms that can be understood by people across the world (Day et al., 2023). An example of this is a study of *Ne Zha* reception overseas which found that allegiance to the moral issues of the myth and family motifs enabled international audiences to relate the stories to more fundamental human experiences, and increase cultural knowledge (Luchen & Sishi, 2023). Likewise, the study of *Monkey King: Hero Is Back* shows that viewers saw the movie as a reflection of Chinese cultural values specifically due to the fact that the decisions of adaptation ensured the symbolic continuity with the source text (X. Li, 2024).

In adaptation studies, fidelity is treated as a multidimensional concept rather than a literal reproduction of the source text. In the context of mythological novels, fidelity can be understood through the extent to which a film preserves the core narrative structure, key character functions, and central moral and cosmological meanings, while translating these elements into cinematic choices such as dialogue, pacing, performance, scene, and visual effects. Accordingly, this study treats fidelity as the preservation of the narrative and cultural essence of the original mythology, including culturally specific motifs and values, even when the storyline is condensed or visually reimagined for screen storytelling.

H1: Fidelity of adaptation positively influences cultural understanding.

2.2 Fidelity of Adaptation and Cultural Appreciation

Fidelity has additionally been depicted to be influential in the crafting of cultural esteem by promoting emotional steeple and admiration of the cultural background of works adapted (Davis et al., 2023). Previous studies show that loyal adaptation approaches prompt audiences to accept the diversity and distinctiveness of the original cultural context

and admire the culture under representation even more (Шиго & Есембеков, 2024). According to the audience reception research on *Ne Zha*, the international spectators showed their admiration of the Chinese cultural aesthetics, including Taoist cosmology and Confucian family ideals, when those aspects were thoughtfully preserved and transformed into the language of the film (Guo, 2023). Similarly, faithful representations of mythological symbolism in adaptations of *The Investiture of the Gods* have been shown to enhance intercultural audiences' respect for Chinese cultural heritage, as viewers recognized both the entertainment value and the historical-cultural depth of the narratives (Nittas et al., 2024). When fidelity ensures the accurate portrayal of rituals, beliefs, and mythic archetypes, it contributes to cultivating positive attitudes and admiration toward the source culture (Ma & Wang, 2024).

H2: Fidelity of adaptation positively influences cultural appreciation.

2.3 Visual Representation of Cultural Symbols and Cultural Understanding

Scholars have highlighted that the visual representation of cultural symbols in film plays a crucial role in how audiences interpret and internalize cultural meaning (Day et al., 2023; Jumrah & Brian; Ma & Wang, 2024). Past research suggests that symbolic imagery such as costumes, architectural styles, mythological creatures, and ritual practices acts as a semiotic bridge that enables intercultural viewers to decode unfamiliar traditions and values (Sihombing & Al'ula, 2023). In the case of Chinese mythological adaptations, studies on *Monkey King* films have shown that the vivid portrayal of divine beings, celestial palaces, and Buddhist motifs allowed audiences to grasp cosmological and moral concepts central to Chinese culture, even without prior textual knowledge (X. Li, 2024; Yang, 2023). Similarly, visual studies on *Ne Zha* found that the integration of Taoist symbolism and traditional Chinese iconography significantly enhanced international audiences' understanding of themes such as destiny, transformation, and filial duty (Fang & Mansor, 2024).

H3: Visual representation of cultural symbols positively influences cultural understanding.

2.4 Visual Representation of Cultural Symbols and Cultural Appreciation

The role of visual representation has also been empirically linked to cultural appreciation, particularly in contexts where symbolic imagery generates admiration for the aesthetic and philosophical depth of a culture (Wu & Zou, 2025). Research on audience reception of *The Investiture of the Gods* and related adaptations found that viewers expressed heightened cultural appreciation when exposed to visually rich depictions of mythological battles, ritual performances, and traditional Chinese iconography, as these elements conveyed a sense of authenticity and artistic uniqueness (Chen & Liu, 2023; Yu et al., 2025). Visual aesthetics, such as traditional costumes and symbolic landscapes, have also been noted to stimulate intercultural viewers' aesthetic appreciation by emphasizing the harmony and moral values embedded in Chinese mythology (Harrison et al., 1996). Moreover, a study on the global circulation of Chinese animated films highlighted that appreciation was fostered when cultural symbols were not only visually captivating but also emotionally resonant, encouraging audiences to recognize the cultural artistry underlying the narrative (Chen & Liu, 2023).

H4: Visual representation of cultural symbols positively influences cultural appreciation.

2.5 Audience cultural interpretation as Mediator

Audience cultural interpretation has been increasingly recognized in adaptation and intercultural communication literature as the process through which viewers actively decode, contextualize, and assign meaning to cultural elements presented in films (Guo, 2023). While fidelity of adaptation provides the narrative and symbolic foundation, it is the audience's interpretive engagement that determines whether cultural understanding is achieved (Reagin & Năstase, 2024). Empirical studies show that viewers with different cultural backgrounds interpret mythological narratives in varied ways depending on their prior knowledge and ability to connect symbolic elements with familiar frameworks (Day et al., 2023; Guo, 2023; Ma & Wang, 2024). Research on *Monkey King: Hero Is Back* revealed that fidelity to source material offered cultural cues, but deeper cultural understanding emerged only when audiences interpreted the values of perseverance, loyalty, and spiritual growth in relation to their own cultural schemas (Li, 2025). In addition to enhancing cultural comprehension, audience interpretation also mediates the pathway through which fidelity of adaptation contributes to cultural appreciation. Literature on adaptation reception highlights that appreciation arises not solely from exposure to faithful narratives but from the ways in which viewers emotionally and aesthetically interpret the preserved cultural elements (Yang, 2023). For example, studies on *The Investiture of the Gods* show that audience admiration for the visual and thematic fidelity of the adaptation was heightened when individuals interpreted symbolic battles and mythological archetypes as representations of cultural depth and artistic ingenuity (Fang & Mansor, 2024).

H5: Audience cultural interpretation mediates the relationship between fidelity of adaptation and cultural understanding.

H6: Audience cultural interpretation mediates the relationship between fidelity of adaptation and cultural appreciation.

Visual representation of cultural symbols provides audiences with rich semiotic cues, but the process of cultural

understanding relies heavily on how these symbols are interpreted and internalized by viewers. Prior research shows that symbols such as dragons, phoenixes, or Taoist ritual imagery do not carry inherent meaning across cultures but require audience interpretation to be contextually understood (Liang et al., 2023). Studies on *Monkey King* films found that while visual depictions of mythological beings captured audience attention, the actual cultural understanding depended on whether viewers interpreted these figures as embodiments of virtues like wisdom, courage, or justice (Fang et al., 2025). Similarly, research on *Ne Zha* demonstrated that the portrayal of Taoist cosmology and traditional iconography enhanced intercultural comprehension only when audiences actively decoded the symbolic significance behind these visual cues (Li, 2025). Beyond comprehension, visual representation of cultural symbols also contributes to cultural appreciation, yet this relationship is strongly shaped by the interpretive processes of the audience (Jianchao, 2023). Research on the reception of *The Investiture of the Gods* revealed that while elaborate depictions of ritual performances and mythological battles impressed viewers, appreciation was significantly deepened when audiences interpreted these visuals as artistic expressions of cultural heritage (Leung et al., 2025). Similarly, international audience studies on Chinese animated films found that while costumes, landscapes, and symbolic imagery were visually appealing, genuine cultural appreciation emerged when viewers connected these visuals with the cultural values they represented, such as harmony, resilience, or spiritual transcendence (Haiyan et al., 2024).

H7: Audience cultural interpretation mediates the relationship between visual representation of cultural symbols and cultural understanding.

H8: Audience cultural interpretation mediates the relationship between visual representation of cultural symbols and cultural appreciation.

2.6 Language accessibility as Moderator

The accessibility of language has been defined as one of the factors that determine the ways in which audiences perceive and internalize cultural meanings of foreign films (Wong et al., 2023). Previous research notes the fact that cultural interpretation is reliant on the involvement of the audience with visual and narrative clues, but the clarity and precision of subtitles or dubbing influence the level to which such interpretation does result in cultural comprehension (Wang et al., 2025). Cross-cultural film reception studies have determined that poor quality of subtitles can lead to distortion of meaning, omission of symbolism or cultural nuances, thereby corrupting the connection between meaning and understanding (Zhumatayeva et al., 2023). On the other hand, the quality translation enhances the ability of audience to decode and place cultural allusions in discussions and narrations (Liu, 2023). In addition to the determination of understanding, language accessibility has been discovered to influence the level of cultural interpretation to cultural appreciation (Wong et al., 2023). According to the former research in audiovisual translation, the ability to feel a sense of appreciation toward a foreign culture is directly connected with the ability of the audience to become engaged emotionally in terms of the narrative dialogue, symbolic language, and cultural idioms (Zhang et al., 2023). Subtitles or dubbing can make the film more realistic or richer in relation to their artistic value, which causes the viewer to admire the original culture even more (Ziling et al., 2025). Quite to the contrary, erroneous and over literal translation may cause confusion or relative detachment of interpretive works and may destroy cultural appreciation, despite any visual and narrative implementation excelling itself in the interpretation (Wang et al., 2025).

H9: Language accessibility moderates the relationship between audience cultural interpretation and cultural understanding, such that the relationship is stronger when subtitles/dubbing quality is high.

H10: Language accessibility moderates the relationship between audience cultural interpretation and cultural appreciation, such that the relationship is stronger when subtitles/dubbing quality is high.

2.7 Theoretical Framework Supporting the Research

This research integrates adaptation theory, intercultural communication theory, and semiotic perspectives to explain how cultural meaning is transmitted and received through mythological film adaptations. Together, these approaches frame adaptation as a process where cultural narratives are reshaped for screen and then negotiated by audiences during viewing.

From the standpoint of adaptation theory, fidelity is approached as the degree to which an adaptation sustains the narrative and cultural essence of a source text, including characters, plot functions, value systems, and mythic symbolism, even when cinematic constraints require condensation or creative reinterpretation. In this sense, fidelity is expected to supply viewers with coherent cultural cues that support comprehension and appreciation, particularly for audiences with limited prior familiarity with Chinese mythology (Hutcheon, 2006).

Intercultural communication theory emphasizes that cultural learning is not automatic but emerges through audience interpretation. Viewers decode filmic messages through their own frameworks of meaning, which positions audience cultural interpretation as a mediating process linking adaptation strategies to intercultural outcomes (Hall, 1997). Semiotics adds that cultural symbols such as ritual objects, architectural motifs, and mythological creatures operate as

signs that require decoding, making visual representation a key channel for cultural transmission (Barthes, 1972).

Although adaptation decisions and translation practices occur at different stages of film production and distribution, they converge in audience reception. In this study, language accessibility is treated as a contextual condition that shapes how effectively viewers can interpret narrative cues, symbolic dialogue, and culturally loaded expressions. High quality subtitling and dubbing are therefore expected to strengthen the conversion of interpretation into cultural understanding and appreciation, without assuming that translation determines the fidelity of the adaptation itself. Rather, language accessibility affects the clarity with which audiences can access and evaluate the cultural cues preserved by the adaptation.

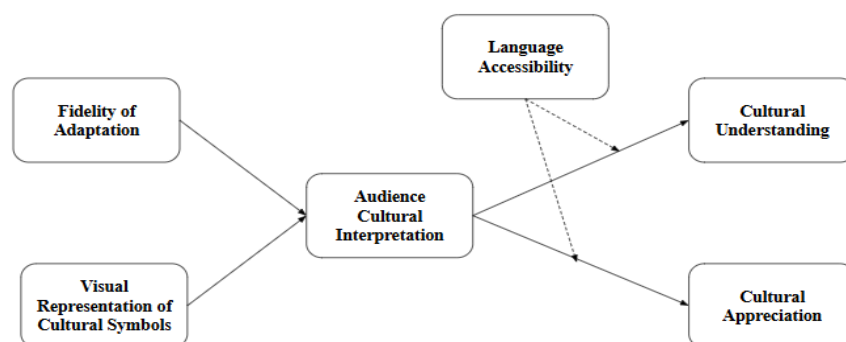


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

3. Methodology

The study was based on mixed-methods design, a quantitative and qualitative approach used to reflect both the generalizability of relationships between key constructs and the more insightful interpretations of the audience experiences. The explanatory sequential design was selected, according to which the quantitative stage of the study, the statistic associations were enabled, and the qualitative stage examined the perception of the international audience on cultural symbols, fidelity of adaptation, and quality of translation. This design was designed to guarantee methodological rigor and deliver the richness of context that is needed to comprehend intercultural reception in film adaptation.

In the quantitative part, the target population was the international viewers who had already viewed film adaptation of Chinese mythological novels, including *Journey to the West*, *Ne Zha*, and *The Investiture of the Gods*. Since the movies were globally spread, purposive sampling was used, so that no participants would have been unfamiliar with at least one adaptation. Three hundred and twenty-one valid responses were found, and this is larger than the minimum size of the sample needed in structural equation modeling (SEM) generally established at 10 to 15 respondents per estimate (Hair et al., 2012). The data was gathered by use of an online structured questionnaire administered to the respondents via the university network, social media and the movie discussion forums. To tailor the questionnaire to sound and to make the survey items culturally appropriate, a pilot test was performed with the participation of 30 respondents. Validated multi-item Likert-type scales were used to measure all variables, using response options from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Constructs were fidelity of adaptation (Hutcheon, 2006), visual representation of cultural symbols (Barthes, 1972), audience cultural interpretation (Hall, 1997), cultural understanding (Byram, 1997), cultural appreciation (cultural appreciation scales), and language accessibility (Cintas & Remael, 2020). The analysis of data was conducted in SmartPLS where measurement validity and reliability were checked using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted. Direct, mediating, and moderating effects in the proposed model were evaluated using SEM with bootstrapping (5,000 resamples).

In this study, fidelity of adaptation refers to the extent to which viewers perceive the film to preserve the original mythological narrative and cultural essence, including key characters, plot arcs, moral themes, and culturally specific motifs. This definition aligns with the audience centered orientation of the model because participants were not required to conduct a textual comparison with the original novels. Instead, survey items asked respondents to evaluate whether the film appeared to respect the source story and conveyed culturally grounded meanings. Language accessibility refers to the perceived clarity and naturalness of subtitles or dubbing, focusing on whether translation choices made culture loaded expressions understandable and emotionally resonant.

A qualitative step was added to the survey results to confirm the results of the survey with 12 semi-structured interviews. The interviewees were selected amongst the respondents to the survey who expressed their desire to be further involved, and purposive selection was used to make sure that the sample includes diversity in terms of cultural background, age, and film-viewing experience. The interviews (ranging between 45 and 60 minutes) were held online through video

conferencing systems. The interpretations of fidelity, symbolic imagery, and quality of translation and the emotional and aesthetic reaction to the Chinese mythological films were investigated by them. All the interviews were recorded with approval and transcribed verbatim to be analyzed. Thematic analysis was applied, and it consisted of three phases, namely open coding to discover concepts, axial coding to group similar codes into broad ones, and selective coding to create integrative themes to join audience interpretations to the wider outcomes of culture. To achieve reliability, a sub-set of transcripts was coded independently by two researchers, and any discrepancies were settled by discussion. Lastly, the results of the two phases were combined to give a whole picture of the research problem. The quantitative analysis gave prominence to the statistical significance and strength of the relationships that were being tested, whereas qualitative analysis provided further insights into how audiences created meaning. Triangulation of the survey data with the narrative accounts confirmed the patterns that were observed in SEM, but also added descriptions of how symbolic authenticity, fidelity, and translation could be experienced on the individual and cultural level. This combination made the study more valid and highlighted the importance of mixed methods to investigate intercultural reception of films.

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative Findings

Table 1 and Figure 2 show the validity and reliability statistics for all the study constructs, representing adequate measurement properties. In audience cultural interpretation, the outer loadings were between 0.612 and 0.814, while Cronbach's alpha was 0.831, composite reliability (CR) was 0.878, and average variance extracted (AVE) was 0.547, all of which met the accepted standards. Cultural appreciation was also highly reliable with item loadings ranging from 0.783 to 0.845, Cronbach's alpha of 0.882, CR of 0.913, and AVE of 0.679, denoting excellent convergent validity. Cultural understanding also had item loadings ranging from 0.755 to 0.880, Cronbach's alpha of 0.850, CR of 0.899, and AVE of 0.691, affirming internal consistency. Fidelity of adaptation possessed loadings between 0.776 and 0.900, Cronbach's alpha of 0.898, CR of 0.925, and AVE of 0.712, indicating construct reliability and validity. Language accessibility had loadings of between 0.847 and 0.872, with Cronbach's alpha of 0.823, CR of 0.894, and AVE of 0.738, and therefore established reliability. Finally, visual representation of cultural symbols had item loadings of 0.785-0.866, Cronbach's alpha of 0.861, CR of 0.905, and AVE of 0.704, which represented great measurement qualities. All constructs had acceptable convergent validity and reliability.

Table 1. Variable reliability and validity

	Items	Outer Loading	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Audience Cultural Interpretation	ACI1	0.796	0.831	0.878	0.547
	ACI2	0.814			
	ACI3	0.727			
	ACI4	0.806			
	ACI5	0.612			
	ACI6	0.660			
Cultural Appreciation	CA1	0.837	0.882	0.913	0.679
	CA2	0.845			
	CA3	0.831			
	CA4	0.822			
	CA5	0.783			
Cultural Understanding	CU1	0.755	0.850	0.899	0.691
	CU2	0.846			
	CU3	0.880			
	CU4	0.838			
Fidelity of Adaptation	FA1	0.883	0.898	0.925	0.712
	FA2	0.827			
	FA3	0.900			
	FA4	0.828			
	FA5	0.776			
Language Accessibility	LA1	0.872	0.823	0.894	0.738
	LA2	0.859			
	LA3	0.847			
Visual Representation of Cultural Symbols	VR1	0.840	0.861	0.905	0.704
	VR2	0.866			
	VR3	0.864			
	VR4	0.785			

The measurement model results demonstrate that the constructs in this study exhibit strong reliability and convergent validity, indicating that the survey instrument effectively captures the theoretical dimensions under investigation. The Cronbach's α and composite reliability values, which range from 0.823 to 0.925, surpass the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, suggesting that the scales are internally consistent and provide stable measurements of the intended

concepts. Similarly, the average variance extracted (AVE) values, ranging from 0.547 to 0.738, are above the benchmark of 0.50, confirming that a substantial proportion of variance is explained by the indicators and that the items converge well to represent their respective constructs. The outer loadings further support this conclusion, with most items exceeding the recommended level of 0.70, and although two items under Audience Cultural Interpretation (ACI5 = 0.612, ACI6 = 0.660) are slightly lower, they remain within the acceptable range and do not compromise the construct's overall validity. Rather, this slight variation reflects the inherent complexity and diversity in how audiences engage with and interpret cultural elements, highlighting the richness of this construct.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the measurement model not only provides a statistically sound foundation for testing the hypothesized relationships but also reinforces the theoretical assumption that constructs such as fidelity of adaptation, visual representation of cultural symbols, language accessibility, cultural understanding, and cultural appreciation are both conceptually coherent and empirically measurable. This ensures that the subsequent structural model analysis rests on robust and trustworthy measurement, thereby enhancing the credibility and practical relevance of the study's conclusions for both adaptation theory and intercultural communication practice.

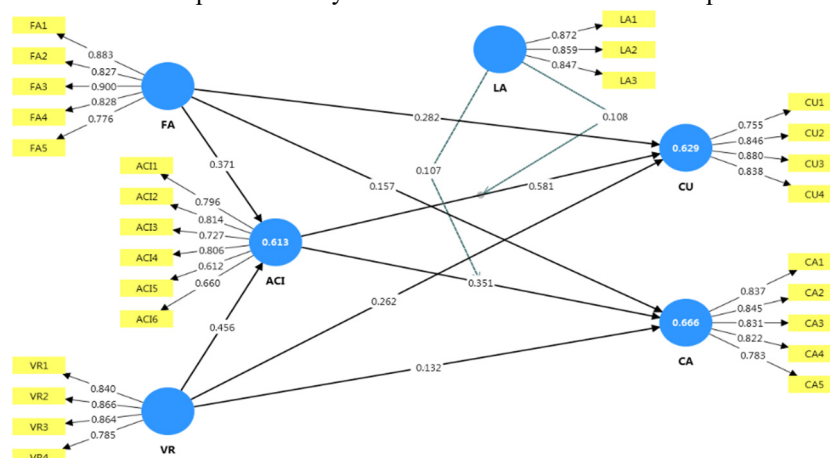


Figure 2. Estimated Model

The structural model results presented in Figure 2 illustrate the hypothesized relationships among fidelity of adaptation (FA), visual representation of cultural symbols (VR), audience cultural interpretation (ACI), language accessibility (LA), cultural understanding (CU), and cultural appreciation (CA). Both fidelity of adaptation and visual representation show significant positive effects on audience cultural interpretation, with path coefficients of 0.371 and 0.456 respectively, indicating that faithful adaptations and the effective use of cultural symbols strongly encourage viewers to engage in deeper cultural interpretation. Audience cultural interpretation, in turn, exerts a positive influence on both cultural understanding ($\beta = 0.262$) and cultural appreciation ($\beta = 0.351$), confirming its mediating role in the model. This suggests that audiences do not passively receive cultural messages; rather, their interpretative engagement functions as a bridge through which adaptation fidelity and visual symbolism are translated into meaningful cultural outcomes.

Furthermore, the direct paths from fidelity of adaptation and visual representation to cultural understanding and appreciation also remain significant, demonstrating that these two adaptation strategies not only work indirectly through interpretation but also have direct impacts on intercultural outcomes. The model also highlights the role of language accessibility as a moderator. The path coefficient from ACI to CU ($\beta = 0.107$) and from ACI to CA ($\beta = 0.132$) are strengthened in the presence of higher-quality subtitles and dubbing, underscoring the importance of linguistic mediation in intercultural film reception. Collectively, these findings provide empirical support for the ten hypothesized relationships (H1 to H10), confirming that fidelity and symbolism foster intercultural communication, audience interpretation mediates this process, and language accessibility enhances the effectiveness of interpretation in generating cultural understanding and appreciation.

Table 2 presents discriminant validity results based on heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). All values of HTMT are less than the conservative limit of 0.85, thereby validating that all the constructs are empirically different from one another. Cultural interpretation of the audience was positively correlated with cultural appreciation at 0.812 and cultural understanding at 0.802, proposing strong but discriminant correlations. Cultural appreciation also had moderate HTMT values with fidelity of adaptation (0.686) and language accessibility (0.846), whereas its correlation with visual representation of cultural symbols was lower at 0.590. Cultural understanding had moderate HTMTs with fidelity of adaptation (0.710) and language accessibility (0.724), whereas the HTMT with visual representation was 0.555, also contributing to discriminant validity. Fidelity of adaptation had its highest HTMT with visual representation of cultural

symbols (0.819), demonstrating their conceptual proximity but nonetheless within the acceptable threshold. Lastly, language accessibility had comparatively weaker HTMTs, for example, 0.421 with visual representation, pointing towards distinctiveness. These findings overall exhibit that the constructs are indeed differentiated well, establishing discriminant validity on the measurement model.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

	ACI	CA	CU	FA	LA	VR
Audience Cultural Interpretation						
Cultural Appreciation	0.812					
Cultural Understanding	0.802	0.722				
Fidelity of Adaptation	0.845	0.686	0.710			
Language Accessibility	0.649	0.846	0.724	0.552		
Visual Representation of Cultural Symbols	0.815	0.590	0.555	0.819	0.421	

Table 3 shows explained variance and model fit statistics for the structural model. Audience cultural interpretation had an R-square of 0.613 and an adjusted R-square of 0.611, indicating more than 61 percent of its variance is explained by the predictors. Cultural appreciation yielded the highest R-square of 0.666 and adjusted R-square of 0.660, which indicate that the independent and mediating variables explain almost two-thirds of the variance. Cultural understanding yielded an R-square of 0.629 and an adjusted R-square of 0.623, indicating that the model explains 62 percent of its variance. For predictive relevance, Q^2 values were 0.607 for cultural interpretation of the audience, 0.605 for cultural appreciation, and 0.476 for cultural understanding, all of which were greater than zero, thereby affirming predictive validity. Model fit indices also established the sufficiency of the model with RMSE varying between 0.632 and 0.730 and MAE varying between 0.492 and 0.584. The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) was 0.077, below the cut-off of 0.08, and reflects acceptable global model fit. Overall, the findings reflect strong explanatory power and good fit for the model.

Table 3. R-square statistics Model Goodness of Fit Statistics

	R-square	R-square adjusted	Q^2 predict	RMSE	MAE	SRMR
Audience Cultural Interpretation	0.613	0.611	0.607	0.632	0.492	0.077
Cultural Appreciation	0.666	0.660	0.605	0.633	0.494	
Cultural Understanding	0.629	0.623	0.476	0.730	0.584	

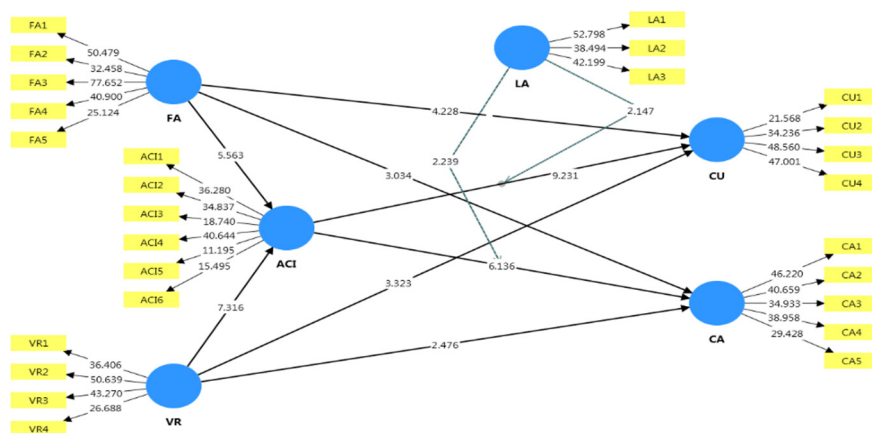


Figure 3. Structural Model for Path Analysis

Table 4 and Figure 3 present path analysis results, denoting the significance of direct, mediating, and moderating relationships. Fidelity of adaptation positively influenced cultural understanding ($\beta = 0.282$, $t = 4.228$, $p = 0.000$) and cultural appreciation ($\beta = 0.157$, $t = 3.034$, $p = 0.001$). Likewise, visual representation of the symbol of culture predicted cultural understanding ($\beta = 0.262$, $t = 3.323$, $p = 0.000$) and cultural appreciation ($\beta = 0.132$, $t = 2.476$, $p = 0.000$). Mediation effects were similarly well supported, with cultural interpretation by the audience mediating the influence of fidelity of adaptation on cultural understanding ($\beta = 0.216$, $t = 5.222$, $p = 0.000$) as well as appreciation ($\beta = 0.130$, $t =$

4.194, $p = 0.000$). In the same vein, audience interpretation facilitated the impacts of visual representation on cultural appreciation ($\beta = 0.160$, $t = 4.409$, $p = 0.000$) and cultural understanding ($\beta = 0.265$, $t = 5.137$, $p = 0.000$). On the moderating side, accessibility of language cemented audience interpretation and cultural understanding ($\beta = 0.108$, $t = 2.147$, $p = 0.000$), and interpretation and cultural appreciation ($\beta = 0.107$, $t = 2.239$, $p = 0.000$). These findings together verify the postulated relationships, which show the pivotal position of fidelity, symbolism, interpretation, and translation in intercultural communication.

Table 4. Path Analysis

	Path Coefficient	T values	P values
FA → CU	0.282	4.228	0.000
FA → CA	0.157	3.034	0.001
VR → CU	0.262	3.323	0.000
VR → CA	0.132	2.476	0.000
FA → ACI → CU	0.216	5.222	0.000
FA → ACI → CA	0.130	4.194	0.000
VR → ACI → CU	0.265	5.137	0.000
VR → ACI → CA	0.160	4.409	0.000
LA x ACI → CU	0.108	2.147	0.000
LA x ACI → CA	0.107	2.239	0.000

4.2 Qualitative Findings

The thematic analysis on the 12 interviews revealed that there were several common themes that provided further insight on how Chinese mythological adaptations are being perceived by foreign audiences. An important number of themes have been identified: symbolic authenticity as cultural membership, loyalty to story and belief in adaptation, quality of translation as a gateway to meaning and sentiment through visual imagery. These themes are further elaborations and contextualization of the statistical results of quantitative phase.

The first theme, known as symbolic authenticity as a rapport with culture, highlighted the importance of recognizable culturally based imagery to the audience, which is their involvement. The interviewees also emphasized that the appeal of visual symbols such as dragons, phoenixes and taoist ritual objects was the gateway into Chinese cultural values. One of the respondents stated that even when he heard about the dragon, it was not just an animal, but force and wisdom. I am not much familiar with the Chinese background, but I found myself relating to the culture due to the way it was introduced. Some other interviewee mentioned that those symbols had the meanings that had to overcome the language barriers: I could not always follow the conversation, but the costumes, the temples and the rituals spoke themselves. They did not even have to speak because they told me a story about respect and tradition. The observation is not unique, but it is in line with the survey data, where visual representation was discovered to contribute largely to cultural understanding.

The second one, narrative faithfulness and trust in adaptation, was premised on the audience experience of cultural integrity and respect because of faithfulness to the original myths. Some of the participants claimed that when films are prepared in close relation to the mythological stories, they not only get to know more about the elements in the culture, but they also treasure the artistic efforts that have been made to save the legacy. One of the participants wrote, I thought that the movie was fair to the myth- it did not over-generalize or westernize it. That gave me faith in it and consideration of more about the culture behind it. Others allied this to adaptations that had gone too far and lost sense: Sometimes when films modernise beyond the level of recognition, I am inclined to think I am viewing another fantasy film, not a film with Chinese roots. Those considerations expand on the quantitative information of how fidelity predetermines both cultural expertise and appreciation to indicate the interpretive work that viewers do to assess authenticity.

The third theme was the quality of translation as a point of entry to meaning. Subtitles and dubbing always affected not only their level of understanding, but their perception of cultural richness as well, stressed the respondents. Other interviewees complained of wrong or awkward translations. To give an example, one of the participants claimed, some of the phrases were not understandable in English. I knew it was important in Chinese, but the subtitle was so shallow that the meaning was lost. Some emphasized the merit of the good quality translation: in *Ne Zha* the subtitles were correctly made ready. They did not lose the amusement or the feeling. It appears I were heading the direction that a Chinese audience would experience it. This theme reveals the mediating role of translation as the not only intellectual but also passionate attachment to culture as the moderating role of the language accessibility implemented during the quantitative stage.

And, finally, the emotional connection to the visual level was a way to remind that one did not need to understand the movie to like it, but one needed to be overwhelmed by the beauty and the amazement formed by the work of the cinematography of the films. The grandeur of the battle scenes, the elaborate costumes and the symbolic scenery was what the participants cited as having touched them. I interviewed one of them and he said that the palace in the heavens was awesome. Guided by the mythology or not, I got the sense that I was experience something very spiritual. One other observed, how the movie made me feel so small and close at the same time, I did not merely follow the story, I felt

the culture and saw it with my eyes. These remarks indicate that the appreciation is not solely mental but also affective, which is a consequence of aesthetic engagement in no less than interpretive understanding. Together, these themes reveal the fact that international audiences are proactive creators of a cultural meaning whereby they respond to symbols, evaluate fidelity, read translation and respond emotionally to visual aesthetics. Through this they will cease to be passive spectators but will be cross cultural communicators who will act as interpreters thereby making Chinese mythological films more effective in their role as cultural bridges.

5. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the fidelity of adaptation is a modifying factor that either or both of intercultural results in the sense of the degree of comprehension and appreciation. All these were confirmed in terms of quantitative analysis, which has demonstrated that fidelity is a significant predictor of such effects, and the impact is also mediated by cultural interpretation by the audience. The qualitative interviews elaborate on this statistical trend by illustrating the interpretation of fidelity of the viewers in terms of authenticity and culture-origin valor. Some of the participants explained that the faithful adaptations were what made them trust the film and how they believed that the cultural background was being treated with respect. It was noted that the non-oversimplified and non-westernized story presented the agriculture of the Chinese mythology with jubilation. Conversely, when fidelity was involved, the respondents claimed that they were disengaged because they claimed the movie was just another fantasy and not a real account of the culture. This means that fidelity is not only a structural variable that can be measured through surveys but also a relational measure and it is also directly associated with the way audiences establish cultural legitimacy. In theory, these findings extend adaptation theory one step further because they indicate that fidelity is not merely a textual alignment problem, but also an interpretive device capable of being employed by the audience in their meaning negotiation across cultures.

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative evidence suggests that international audiences interpret a faithful adaptation as one that maintains recognizable narrative anchors and cultural intentions. Participants associated fidelity with continuity in character motivations, preservation of core moral dilemmas, and the avoidance of excessive cultural simplification. This audience level understanding clarifies why fidelity supports intercultural outcomes in the model, because perceived respect for the original myth increased viewers' willingness to interpret cultural symbols and engage emotionally with the story world.

Pictorial representation of cultural symbols was also made to be a significant predictor of cultural knowledge and cultural appreciation, and the interviews revealed how the audiences understood the pictorial representations in the real world. The participants also emphasized that symbolic imagery such as dragons, phoenixes, ritual performances, and celestial architecture was the key to an easy introduction into the Chinese cultural values (Hutcheon, 2006). Even without knowing the language fully, such images were some sort of universal language, which provided semiotic hints that allowed viewers to understand unknown customs and philosophies (Hall, 1997). As an example, one of the participants told them that watching the movie enabled him or her to relate the dragon to the concepts of wisdom and benevolence, albeit without much prior familiarity with Chinese cosmology. Others referred to costumes and temples as the silent story of respect, hierarchy and spirituality. The latter observations prove the semiotic theory statement that meaning is being transmitted by symbols though it needs decoding and emphasize the dual purpose of images to not only teach but also cause marvel. Notably, the interviews found that appreciation could not always be founded on the rational understanding; occasionally, it could be based on the emotional and aesthetic gratification of perceiving the cultural symbols in a visual appealing way. This shows that visual representation plays a dual role in cognitive understanding on the one hand and affective appreciation on the other hence it is an essential process of intercultural reception of film.

The cultural interpretation of the audience appeared as one of the central processes that turned the exposure into meaning-making. The quantitative model upheld its mediating purpose and displayed that both fidelity and symbolism had stronger influences on cultural understanding and appreciation once mediated by interpretation (Zhumatayeva et al., 2023). The interviews provided us a fragment of this mediating process since it revealed the active labor that the audiences of cultural content engage in during the process of decoding cultural content. The other respondents indicated that they viewed Confucian moral dilemmas to be family values and those believed that the perseverance of the Sun Wukong was a symbol of resilience that was applicable in their lives. This multiplicity of meaning will support the different reception theory argument, that audiences are also co-producers of meaning by drawing on their own cultural systems to construct meaning out of the new narratives (Yang, 2023). Qualitative findings provide what the quantitative ones do not provide, i.e., that not only an understanding is created but also an emotional appeal. One of them explained that the mythological battles were impressive to watch but they only made sense when they were interpreted as cultural power and cohesion. Interpretation is not, then, a decoding act but, instead, an affective and cognitive act, making narrative faithfulness, symbolic images, become lived intercultural experiences.

The availability of languages also contributed to describing how intercultural meaning-making is improved or

obstructed. Quantitative data proved the connection between interpretation and cultural understanding and appreciation wherein the quality of translation mediated them and was stronger when the subtitles or dubbed information was accurate and was weaker when it was inaccurate (Hu et al., 2024). This was achieved by this moderation influence via the qualitative narratives. Other respondents described that there were instances that they encountered where cultural idioms have been stripped of their meaning under the guise of poor translation of subtitles that lead to confusion or disaffiliation. Someone remarked, some of the expressions in English were not understandable. Something serious was going on, it was just flattened by the subtitles, I knew there was something serious (X. Li, 2024). Quality subtitles that retained humor and subtlety were highly rated by others and told them they felt it would be viewed better by a Chinese audience. The latter descriptions can be added to the argument of the research on audiovisual translation that linguistic mediation is not neutral, yet it can affect the emotional and intellectual engagement of viewers. Practically this indicates that the quality of translation is not an incidental aspect but a pre-determiner of intercultural results, which directly affects the success or failure of fidelity and symbolism to have the communicative consequences intended.

Lastly, the message of emotional appeal via visual aesthetics adds to the perspective of cultural appreciation which a set of quantitative data would have been unable to gauge. Although the survey findings shared the positive correlation between symbolism, interpretation and appreciation, the interviews showed that appreciation was usually based on affective and aesthetic reactions. The subjects shared their experiences of being awe-struck at the sight of celestial palaces, being impressed by the details of costumes, and even spiritual contact when they saw the images of Taoist rituals. One of them told us that scenes of the palace were breathtaking and created this sense of beauty and transcendence and another one told us that artistry could make them feel that they belong to something greater than the story itself. These definitions show that cultural appreciation is not always about being aware of cultural facts but enjoying cultural beauty. This observation enhances theoretical argumentations in the regard of illustrating that intercultural communication through a film is not just cognitive education but emotional involvement. The mixed-methods approach is a blend of statistical generalizations, the richness of the mythological adaptations, such that the audience can feel that it is not merely a viewer, but an interpretive agent, which negotiates authenticity, interprets symbols, believes in translation, and is a respondent to visual art.

6. Implications

6.1 Practical Implications

The practical aspect of this research has significance to the filmmakers, cultural policymakers, and creative industries professionals who would like to implement the concept of utilizing cinema as a tool of intercultural communication. The results emphasize the aspect that faithfulness to adaptation and good visual image of cultural symbols can not only enhance the validity of the narration but also support the understanding and appreciation of culture with the help of interpretation by the audience and good translation. It translates to the practitioners that they must invest more in studying cultural heritage, collaboration with historians and other cultural professionals and implement the newest translation technologies that would be utilized to provide linguistic and symbolic accuracy. The so-called secondary elements of the film-making subtitles and dubbing are invaluable aids during intercultural education, and there is need to prepare the translators who may perhaps preserve the literal as well as the cultural context. Additionally, the strategies of audience engagement, including educative programs, cultural performances, and online resources that offer background with respect to mythological explanations, as it is found in the research, will assist in making the interpretation more profound and the appreciation more intense. Having such insights, the practitioners will be capable of creating cinematic experiences that will not only serve as a means of entertainment, but they will also allow global dialogue and mutual respect among different audiences and will also help in bridging the cultural gap.

6.2 Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, the study helps to develop the idea of integrating adaptation theory, the intercultural communication theory, semiotics by showing that all three frameworks harmonize to explain the channels through which cultural knowledge and appreciation is created in the process of myths variations. The mediation and moderation effects acceptance will show that intercultural communication cannot be properly explained by any linear models, in which cultural transfer is automatic; it should be considered as an interactive process with interpretation and contextual facilitators. The study validates the mediating position of the cultural interpretation of the audience, which supports reception-oriented interpretations that place the audience as an agent in making meaning, which goes beyond textual fidelity as an adaptation theory. Equally, the mediating effect of language accessibility can be added to the intercultural communication theory as a factor that underlines how the quality of translation determines the effectiveness of cultural learning and appreciation, a phenomenon that has been neglected in the theoretical discourses of media globalization. By doing that, the study is a high-quality conceptual framework that fills in the gap between cultural production and cultural reception that will give future researchers a model to test on the various cultural texts that cross linguistic and cultural boundaries through adaptations of mythologies as well as a broad spectrum of cultural texts that circulate and pass across linguistic and cultural borders.

7. Limitations and Future Directions

7.1 Limitations

Even with its contributions, this research has its share of limitations which must be mentioned. The research was based on the techniques of quantitative survey, which, though suitable to test the hypotheses, could have limited the level of understanding how the audiences interpret it. Though the intercultural constructs of fidelity, symbolic visuals, cultural interpretation, and language accessibility were operationalized using validated scales, the depth of intercultural meaning-making cannot be adequately and exhaustively described using self-reported instruments. Additionally, a sample of audiences that had been exposed to Chinese films before was used as a study population, and this could be a limiting factor in generalizing results to the larger international population less exposed to Chinese mythology. The other limitation is the lack of consideration of cross-sectional design, which fails to capture how cultural understanding and appreciation can change over time, as the viewers re-exposure to mythological adaptation or encounter the cultural content. Lastly, there might be cultural bias during translation of survey instruments, which may have affected the answers, and therefore the study needs to be conducted in the future using multilingual validation to guarantee quality responses to varied groups of people.

7.2 Future Research Directions

Continuing these shortcomings, future studies might consider the application of mixed-method designs, which may involve quantitative analysis with qualitative methods of focus group interviews, narrative analysis or audience ethnography to identify the subtle ways that viewers interpret mythological narratives. It is also possible that longitudinal studies will give more insight into the way in which repeated exposure to mythological films contributes to long-term cultural understanding and appreciation. Expanding the scope of research to include audiences with no prior exposure to Chinese culture would enhance the generalizability of findings and reveal how cultural learning unfolds for completely unfamiliar viewers. Additionally, future work could investigate the role of emerging technologies such as virtual reality and artificial intelligence in adaptation fidelity and symbol representation, as these tools are increasingly employed in cultural storytelling. Comparative studies across different cultural traditions, for example examining adaptations of Indian epics or Greek myths, could also enrich theoretical development by identifying universal and culture-specific dynamics in intercultural communication through film.

8. Conclusion

This study has explored how film adaptations of Chinese mythological novels contribute to intercultural communication by examining the roles of fidelity of adaptation, visual representation of cultural symbols, audience cultural interpretation, and language accessibility. The findings confirm that fidelity and symbolic visuals are essential in shaping cultural understanding and appreciation, but their influence becomes meaningful only when audiences actively interpret the cultural content presented to them. Moreover, the results demonstrate that language accessibility enhances these interpretive processes, ensuring that cultural messages are both comprehensible and emotionally engaging for global viewers. By integrating insights from adaptation theory, semiotics, and intercultural communication theory, the study highlights the interactive and mediated nature of cultural exchange through cinema. It also emphasizes the importance of translation quality, audience agency, and cultural authenticity as determinants of successful cultural transmission. Overall, the research advances both theoretical and practical understanding of how mythological storytelling on screen serves as a bridge across cultural boundaries, offering pathways for deeper mutual understanding and appreciation in an increasingly interconnected world.

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Authors contributions

Xiaofei Liu led the conceptualization, methodology, data collection, analysis, and drafted the manuscript. Dr. Wan Hasmah Wan Teh supervised the research, contributed to study design, and reviewed and edited the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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