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MULTIMODAL ADAPTATION, RECONSTRUCTION, AND DEVIATION OF IMMORTAL ONES: AN UPSIDE-DOWN WORLD OF CHINESE MYTHOLOGY CREATED IN *MONKEY KING* (2023)

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Abstract

Since time immemorial, immortal ones, or *Shenxians* in Chinese, have been an integral part of the Chinese civilization, reflecting the ancient and everlasting pursuit of immortality, both physically and spiritually. In particular, the epic novel *Journey to the West* offers a panoramic view of their hierarchy, personality, and ways of life. For this reason, the novel has been adapted into different multimedia versions. The animated comedy *Monkey King* (2023), produced by Netflix, is one of the recent but less satisfactory examples, in which the images of immortals are reconstructed in a multimodal manner suffering from adaptational deviation. Based on previous studies on translation, adaptation, and multimodality, this article puts forward a model of multimodal adaptation and uses that framework to evaluate *Monkey King's* major reconstructions of immortals in a transnational context. Focusing on explicit and implicit adaptations, the article discusses how the new presentations of these immortals deviate from those in Chinese culture, and how a world that would appear to be turned upside down, in the eyes of a Chinese audience, comes into being. The article also sheds some light on the effect of transnational adaptations on the culture of origin for the source text.

Keywords: *Immortal Ones; multimodal adaptation; character reconstruction; transnational deviation; Monkey King (2023)*

1. INTRODUCTION

For audiences abroad, the most intriguing part of a literary or adapted work is the exotic culture it offers. This is the case of English works such as *Harry Potter*, or *The Song of Ice and Fire*. The magical world created in such works accounts for their long-lasting appeal to many readers in the non-anglophone world. When it comes to Chinese stories, however, it is the unique oriental cultures and philosophies presented that draw the attention of readers overseas. This is demonstrably the case with the mythology system portrayed in the novel *Journey to the West*.

Journey to the West, or *Xi You Ji*¹ is a Chinese epic novel written in the Ming Dynasty (1368 CE-1644 CE). In general, it depicts the Tang Dynasty (618 A.D.-907 A.D.) pilgrimage under the reign of Emperor Taizong, in which Monk Tang and his three disciples travel to contemporary India, and obtain Buddhist sutras after years of trials. Along the journey, Tang is protected from demons by his disciples Monkey, Pigsy, and Sandy² (Wu, *Monkey* 7), as well as by the Dragon Prince, who serves as his horse. In addition to evil spirits, they also encounter *Shenxians*³ These are immortals of all kinds, who occasionally come to their aid, or whose disciples or steeds fight against them. But in the end, the immortals can always be of help, since their immortality has ensured their graciousness, forgiveness, and noble character. Given this, *Journey to the West* has, with a word of caution, offered a glimpse of the world in which immortals dwell.

Due to its profound understanding of Chinese culture in general and vivid presentation of mythology in particular, this novel has been adapted into various formats in China and beyond, including TV series, films, and cartoons. The

¹ It refers to 《西游记》 in Chinese, which is deemed as one of the four greatest classic Chinese novels. Its authorship remains in dispute but is often attributed to Wu Cheng'en.

² These names refer to Sun Wukong, Zhu Bajie, and Sha Wujing respectively in Chinese. Arthur Waley's translated version is adapted for a better understanding of these characters.

³ Shenxian, or 神仙 in Chinese, which refers to immortal ones. In this novel, most of them live in Heaven while some of them live in the mortal world.

recent adaptation is the Netflix animated film *Monkey King* (2023). Unlike the original, the film selects Monkey alone as the protagonist and concentrates on his endeavors to achieve immortality, which means that only chapters before the pilgrimage are adapted in this version. Still, major adaptation efforts can be evaluated from the following two vantage points. On the one hand, even the chapters in the novel that take place before the journey begins have been greatly abridged. Since *Monkey King* only has a running time of less than two hours, many characters and plots are altered or deleted. On the other hand, many American elements have been included. Produced in the US, the film is laden with themes and topics characteristic of the American dream, heroism, individual growth, etc.

Against this backdrop, it can be argued that *Monkey King* is, to some extent, a clichéd version, in which American values are presented using Chinese characters and stories. Under these circumstances, the essential part of *Journey to the West*, the legendary world of immortality, has been undoubtedly poorly transformed in the transnational context. Put simply, this tragic transposition results in objectionable images of immortals. However since this version is a multi-media one, it is thus imperative to analyze these specific adaptations in a multimodal manner.

2. MULTIMODAL TRANSLATION VS. MULTIMODAL ADAPTATION: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY EXPANSION

Originating in social semiotics, multimodality refers to the emergence of “different social modes in a communicative artifact or event” (van Leeuwen 281). Unlike previous paradigms, this approach investigates existing modes in a combined rather than an isolated way. To be more specific, multimodality goes beyond the single mode of language itself; it stretches to include other crucial domains of communication, i.e. image, gesture, gaze, and posture (Jewitt 14), which offers new insights into translation studies.

As translation is no longer seen as only the transfer of meaning, the importance of modes, non-verbal in particular, has become evident, and the classification of these modes is an interesting topic. Stöckl divides modes into core ones, which include language, image, sound, and music, and subordinate ones, which represent the building blocks of the former (14; Kaindl 259). In

audiovisual translation studies, modes are divided into four types, namely the verbal (stylistic and dialectical features), the literary and theatrical (elements appropriate to the genre), the proxemic and kinetic (non-verbal behaviors in general), and the cinematic (camera and filming technique) (Delabastita 196). Dedicated to dubbing, Chaume comes up with ten “signifying modes for cinematographic language” (16). The first four codes deal with the acoustic channel, which includes the linguistic, the paralinguistic, the musical and special effects, and the sound arrangement, while the other six codes concern the visual channel, including the iconographic, the photographic, the planning, the mobility, the graphic, and the syntactic (Chaume 17-22).

Despite the originality of the definitions introduced, these modes and models concentrate more on non-verbal signs, technical details, or filming techniques, while the issues of cultural sensitivity are rarely explored. Modes have become resources that present challenges to different audiences during the process of meaning-making (Adami & Pinto 77). Amongst them, modes shaped by socio-cultural factors are most in need of explication (Munday *et al.* 234).

In this context, adaptation studies could be expanded to the multimodal level because of its intrinsic and inextricable link with translation, confirmed by the coinage of such terms as “transadaptation” (Gambier 178), “tradaptation” (Gentzler 175). As a type of intersemiotic translation, adaptation is more concerned with the reconstruction of ideas than the production procedures and meaning transfer. However, adaptation incorporates a wide range of acts of transfer, translation, revision, and revisitation (Gould 633). As Johnston puts it, adaptation is “the process of dramaturgical analysis, the preparation for the re-enactment” (66). In that process, the original story is transposed across different media and genres, in which people can narrate, perform, and interact with that story; this might create new and different elements in the adapted story (Hutcheon & O’Flynn 10). In this sense, adaptation takes into account the multidimensional modes between the source text and the adapted product. In other words, multimodal adaptation strategies are not monomodal at all. In a descriptive approach, adaptation shifts coincide with four categories: plot structure, narrative techniques, characterization, and setting (Perdikaki 5-8), which can be judged by the relationship between the adapted and original versions. In terms of Chinese comics-based films, cross-media narrative adaptation strategies are explored, including storyline restructuring, spatial

reconstitution, visual and acoustic integration, and cross-dimensional cultural transcoding (Xu 122). Adapted films and the original written literature they are based on feature essential dissimilarities, which can be observed via such four modalities of media as material, sensorial, spatiotemporal, and semiotic (Elleström 522-523). The above adaptation perspectives have opened up new horizons for the analysis of adaptation in a multimodal context and exemplified how translation and adaptation go hand in hand as we explore them across different modes and media.

3. METHODOLOGY

This section first introduces the data to be analyzed, the immortal ones in *Monkey King*, with a clear classification made among them. Then, an analytical model for multimodal adaptation of these immortal ones is proposed.

3.1. Data

In this article, the data under review are the very Chinese immortal ones in the Netflix version of *Monkey King* (2023). In contrast to vivid descriptions in *Journey to the West*, this abridged film adaptation includes rather few immortal characters, whose prototypes can all be found in the novel. Major immortal characters include Monkey King, the Jade Emperor, Dragon King, King Yama, and Wangmu.⁴

In this article, these immortal ones are divided into three groups for analysis: The Mortal World, The Special Domains, and Heaven, based on their major activity zones or birthplaces. Monkey King, born in the mortal world, belongs exclusively to the first group. As kings of two separate domains, the Dragon King and King Yama reign over the seas and Hell respectively, and have the final say over all creatures and matters. They, like any other gods, are both answerable to the Jade Emperor, and this characteristic assigns them to the second group. The third group includes *tianxians* in Chinese, or immortal Taoist characters with perpetual residence in Heaven. In this version, there are only two of them. Amongst them, His Majesty the Jade Emperor is the supreme ruler of

⁴ It refers to 王母 in Chinese. She is the Queen Mother of the West, the most powerful and important goddess in Heaven.

Heaven, the mortal world, and Hell. Her Majesty Wangmu, however, is the leading female Taoist goddess in Heaven. She and the Jade Emperor altogether represent the principles of yin and yang⁵ in Taoism.

With categories made and information briefed, multimodal adaptation analysis could be conducted based on the specific characteristics of these roles.

Table 1: Multimodal Adaptation Model for Immortal Ones⁶

Modes	Spatial & Temporal Mode	Visual Mode	(Non)verbal Mode	Acoustic Mode
Explicit Adaptation Approach	Storyline	Color	Linguistic features	Music
	Place of the event	Clothing	Speech Content	Song
	Time of the event	Complexion Objects etc.	Language style Critical thinking	Soundtrack
	Plot	Body	Paralinguistic features	
	Deletion vs. addition	Face	Volume	
	Relationship	Hair	Speed	
	Atmosphere	Figure	Accent	
	Weapons & combos	Teeth	In tonation etc.	
	Other roles etc.	Skin etc.		
	Scene	Residence	Non-verbal language	
Display of sceneries	Location	Posture		
Changes of scenes etc.	Function	Gesture		
	Environment	Facial expressions		
Effects Implicit Adaptation	Character Shaping		Story-telling	
	Original vs. creative		Original vs. Adjusted	

⁵ It refers to The Principles of Masculinity and Femininity. Taoism believes that harmony hinges upon the indivisibility and ubiquitousness of these two principles

⁶ Inspired by translation and adaptation studies, the model is descriptive in itself. It tends to list the explicit adaptations made, on which the implicit repercussions of adaptations are based. Detailed implicit analyses are made in terms of characters shaped and stories conveyed to compare the two cultures.

Approach	Hero vs. villain	Lecturing vs. Illuminating
	Western vs. oriental	Chinese values vs. American mentality

(All modes and their adaptations are closely interwoven and mutually reciprocal)		

3.2. Multimodal Character Adaptation Model

Drawing upon literature on multimodality, translation, and adaptation (discussed in Section 2), this article proposes a framework for the multimodal analysis of adaptations of immortal ones in *Monkey King* (2023).

Inspired by multimodal codes discussed in translation (Stöckl 14; Kaindl 259; Delabastita 196; Chaume 16), and strategies or categories for cross-media adaptation (Perdikaki 5-8; Xu 122; Elleström 522-523), the model proposed in this article (Table 1) focuses solely on the adaptation of the immortals here. As previously noted, apart from technical details, if multimodal adaptation is to succeed, the adaptors need to consider three things at play: image, sound, and language, which constitute the last three modes in this model. They serve as micro metrics of cross-media character depiction, the categories of which include relevant visual, verbal, non-verbal, and acoustic features of immortals presented in the adapted version (Table 1). The more macro metrics, as Perdikaki, Xu, and Elleström have indicated, should be the redesigning of the whole story on the spatial and temporal levels, which covers storylines, plots, and scenes of immortals concerned. Altogether, they create a dynamic mode of adaptation design.

The most important of all modes, the first mode is related to the spatial and temporal design in the adapted version, such as the storyline, plots, and scenes. Do major events proceed differently from the original spatially or temporally? Are major plots adjusted to the preference of the target market? Is the relationship between characters harmonious? Is the atmosphere entertaining? What roles do the weapons, combos⁷, and other roles, i.e. servants, play? How are

⁷ Combos refer to a set of actions performed in a sequence that yields a significant advantage in a fight.

different scenes displayed and how do they proceed? These are potential questions to be discussed.

The second mode concentrates on the visual elements presented in the production, including color, body, and location. As explicit knowledge, colors are indicative of untold details of certain immortals and are symbolic of the adaptors' attitudes towards them, while the more direct images of these immortals are represented by their specific body features. The places where these characters reside, however, are the visual representations of the immortals' social status and appetite. The kaleidoscopic visual world adapted is the key to understanding the multifaceted characters created.

Verbal and non-verbal languages are under review in the third mode, including verbal speeches, paralinguistic features, and messages conveyed through body language. In this part, immortals will be evaluated according to the content and profundity of their language, their individual speaking habits, and their body movements. Altogether, these supplement the visual mode in depicting each immortal.

The last mode is the analysis of the acoustic effect. Here music is the top priority. But since the presence of many immortals is not necessarily accompanied by songs and lyrics, not every immortal would be studied from this perspective.

Through the four modes, it is evident that adaptations of immortals take place in explicit forms as exemplified above. In other words, changes in those characters, subtle or overt, can be evaluated quantitatively and descriptively, which can be termed as "explicit adaptation". With this guiding approach, adaptations made in four different modes unknowingly contribute to the cross-cultural narration of the original by shaping characters and retelling stories. In its own right, this is a less obvious cultural effect, referred to as "implicit adaptation." All in all, the two types of adaptations do not work against one another but work together to shape images of immortals under examination using four interrelated modes.

4. MULTIMODAL ADAPTATIONS OF IMMORTALS: CASE STUDY OF RECONSTRUCTION

Under the framework of Table 1, major immortals in *Monkey King (2023)*⁸ are examined with regard to three groups: The Mortal World, The Special Domains, and Heaven. This analysis shows how images of immortals concerned are reconstructed multimodally.

4.1. THE MORTAL WORLD: MONKEY AS HERO

As the main protagonist, Monkey King is most elaboratively depicted so that it can fit into American pop culture. As can be seen from Table 2, Monkey is transformed from a symbol of Chinese rebellion and resourcefulness into an American-style self-centered hero, both explicitly and implicitly.

In the spatial and temporal mode, Monkey is utterly re-envisioned in terms of stories, plots, and scenes involved. In terms of narrative order, the storyline proceeds as Monkey goes through vicissitudes to the final heavenly ascension, imprisonment, and release. It can be divided into three parts: the birth of the Monkey, the quest for immortality, and "Judgment Day." In his pursuit of immortality, Monkey defeats one hundred demons, fights with the Dragon King, stirs chaos in Hell, visits the fake peach orchard, and steals the Elixir of Life from Wangmu, which ensures his full immortality. In general, the storyline represents Monkey's personal growth, but it could be noticed that certain plots are deleted and new elements added.

The subplots featured in the storyline are focused on the period before his westward journey, except for the brief animation of one hundred demons, all of which are beaten by Monkey on the pilgrimage in the original. However, some other plots before the journey are not included, such as his mentorship under a mighty immortal, his lordship of horses, his guardianship of the orchard, and his private relationship with other immortals. Instead of vivid illustrations in the original, the adapted film reinterprets Monkey with new and unique features. Contrary to his harmonious contact with others, Monkey is now in constant conflict with others, immortal or not. On the one hand, in addition to demons, he fights fiercely with the Dragon King, King Yama, Wangmu, and their

⁸ Due to copyright restrictions by Netflix, the pictures of immortals concerned cannot be reproduced in this article. Please visit the website <https://www.netflix.com/sg-zh/title/80237245> for immortals' pictures and other details.

subordinates. On the other hand, his relationship with mortals is not pleasant either. He is firstly despised by other mortal monkeys, being referred to as “a tiny pebble”. But as his power increases, the assertive, formerly bullied hero begins to bully mortals beneath him, particularly his disciple Lin, who he calls “an insignificant tiny pebble.”

Be that as it may, the most disastrous reinterpretation would be the stereotype that Monkey’s power rests upon his stick in its entirety. The myth of Monkey’s power is so pervasive that his image is distorted in this adaptation. That is to say, with his stick he can easily outcompete immortals, but without it, he cannot even win against his mortal disciple. Meanwhile, the abrupt presence of his combos like “Qingdou” seems odd, since the spell was taught to him by his tutor, who is not even mentioned in this adaptation.

In the visual mode, the whole image of Monkey King is reshaped. In the film, Monkey is always shown with brown-red hair and usually has yellow armor and a golden stick. In *Journey to the West*, Monkey King is blond-haired, as implied by “黄发金箍” (Wu, *Xi You Ji* 701), or “yellow hair and golden headband”. The blond hair, combined with his armor and stick, links to the character “金”, or golden in English, which stands for dignity, majesty, and auspiciousness. However, the brown-red hair conveys a sense of wildness and diminishes the effect of the original design.

Most importantly, the body image of Monkey is reconstructed to make him less attractive in form. In this adaptation, Monkey King is given a triangularly shaped torso, with a head like a horse and other features shown in Table 2. All of these make him more a demon than an immortal, a total misrepresentation of his image.

In the verbal and nonverbal modes, his verbal and body language are also reshaped in an American style. On the one hand, his language content is defined by his arrogance and self-righteousness, without many illuminating ideas. More specifically, his use of such words as “peasants,” “pebble,” and “poor, unattractive people” is the epitome of his prejudiced inner thoughts. His creation of the word “spectacul-errfic-amazing-derful” as a praise for his merit further confirms his egocentric nature. Most stunningly, as he approaches a village for

⁹It refers to “Jindou Yun” in Chinese, or the somersault cloud, with which Monkey can instantly travel to places 54,000 kilometers away.

the hundredth demon, he improvises a self-congratulatory introduction of himself:

Name's Monkey King. AKA the Simian Saviour. AKA the Legendary Demon Slayer. And stick. Our amazing skills include pole-fighting punching, kicking, a kick-pole punch combo, the double kick with or without a stick, or the ever-popular fake kick with a spinning pole.
(*Monkey King* 16:37-16:58)

These lines are presented as a rap, taking less than twenty seconds. The quick rap coincides with a display of the skills he mentions, causing the people to fall to the ground. The way that he interacts with others, combined with his statements, shows that he is self-assured and boisterous.

On the other hand, in addition to this, Monkey's visual image is further represented by his gestures and expressions. His pet phrase "Monkey King reigns supreme" is, for example, often accompanied by a special salutation similar to the Nazi salute, one with unpleasant implications, as his body slightly tilts back.

In the acoustic mode, Monkey King is further shaped by the song that he has composed. Set in the animated video in which Monkey conquers demons, the song is featured by its fighting soundtracks, including the roar of demons, the whop of weapons, the scream of slain demons, and the shouts of Monkey. The lyrics of the song are like the theme of *SpongeBob SquarePants* by raising an interrogative question first and answering it later:

Who's the handsome hero we all love and adore?
(Monkey King!)
Who has demons screaming when he knocks on their door?
(Monkey King!)
... (*Monkey King* 15:03-16:04)

Through these explicit multimodal adaptations, the image of Monkey King is implicitly rendered in utter disparity with that in *Journey to the West*. For the character itself, Monkey is redefined as a lonely outcast seeking recognition, a self-centered challenger with no respect for rules, and an American-style hero

whose strength relies on others, i.e. his stick, and whose heroism blurs his inner self. For the effect of story-telling, Monkey as the hero is an epitome of American ideas under the shroud of Chinese characters. In the end, Monkey becomes immortal but the final satisfaction awakens his dark side. This is a topic related to self-achievement, egotism, and the associated values common in boilerplate hero films. Later, when Monkey is released from his imprisonment, he says “I have awakened with peace in my heart.” This is another American adaptation of Monkey's character; unfortunately, in Chinese culture, he is never fully at peace.

Table 2: Multimodal adaptation of Monkey King

Modes	Spatial &Temporal Mode	Visual Mode	(Non)verbal Mode	Acoustic Mode
Explicit Adaptation Approach	Storyline	Color	Linguistic features	Music
	The rearrangement of order.	Yellow armour	Arrogance	Jazz
		Red-brown hair	Self-righteousness	Sounds of strikes
		Golden stick	Simple-headedness	
	Plot	Body	Paralinguistic features	
	Plots before the journey only;	Horsed head; Triangular figure;	Rap styled.	
	Interactions that invariably become conflicts;	Donkey teeth;		
	The invisibility of the stick;	Upward nostrils;		
	The illogical combos;	Black eyes;		
	The clique of monkeys;	Dark lips;		
	Eye Miosis.			
	His disciple Lin.			
Scene	Residence	Non-verbal language		
Fighting animation for scene transitions.	No regular place to be analyzed.	Repeated gestures		
		Melodramatic emojis		
Effects	Character Shaping		Story-telling	

Implicit Adaptation Approach	Lonely outcast	Redefined stories.
	Selfish challenger	Boilerplate Hero Film.
	American styled hero	Ways to find peace.

	(All modes and their adaptations are closely interwoven and mutually reciprocal)	

4.2. The Special Domains: Two Different Kings

For the two special domains, the rulers are kings under the jurisdiction of the Jade Emperor. In this film, the two kings are adapted into a rebel and a loyalist respectively.

4.2.1. *Dragon King as Rebellious Villain*

As the main antagonist, Dragon King is redesigned as the primary villain with vicious intentions of subduing land creatures, Monkey King in particular.

In the spatial and temporal mode, there are immense changes in the storyline and plots concerned. Firstly, Dragon King appears in various places, including villages, and the pretended orchard. His presence constitutes another storyline, which is reclaiming the stick and retaliating against land creatures, in opposition to Monkey's quest for immortality, the main storyline. Secondly, the subplots around the character are often based on his use of the very stick, for which he went on an arduous expedition. Thirdly, other added details represent a full image of him. For one thing, he is set to be a rebel under the reign of Heaven, as confirmed by his complaint towards his superior, the Jade Emperor, which starts with the disrespectful line "I demand satisfaction." Failing to receive a response, the Dragon King then schemes to reclaim the stick and with it rises against land dryers. Finally, he becomes a swollen monster but after being defeated by Monkey, turns into a miniaturized lizard. The plots developed around the Emperor's relationship with his subjects are informative. After the stick is stolen by Monkey, he eats a squid alive as a punishment for statements that offended him. His demanding nature is further demonstrated by his manipulation of his tub-carriers, Babbo and Benbo, two marine creatures.

In the second mode, the Dragon King is reconstructed visually so that he is more like a powerful monster. His purple suit, in particular, relates to his status as king of waters, as purple once represented royals in Western culture. But

combined with green skin and pink barbels, he is depicted as mysterious and related to the minority (sea creatures). His body is a combination of fish, alligators, frogs, and Chinese dragons, as shown in the description of his organs in Table 3. These attributes define him as an evil sea monster. As ludicrous as it might seem, his blue undersea palace, which Monkey calls “tacky,” is not kingly but clownish.

In the verbal and nonverbal modes, Dragon King is defined by his words and movements. At the linguistic level, his words are characteristic of his presumptuousness and hatred for non-marine creatures, and he uses terms such as “land dryers,” “air breathers,” “land-walking,” and “sun-kisser.” At the paralinguistic level, his words are often rhymed, like lyrics, because he is musical and somewhat comic. One example is the rhymes used at the end of his instructions for Babboo and Benbo to deceive Monkey, which read “The tree in the light has the peach he should bite. If it’s hidden by night, then the fruit isn’t right.” At the nonverbal level, he is defined by his attachment to his tub on land, the visual image of his need to remain moist.

In the last mode, Dragon King is defined through his song, “*The World by Storm*,” which underscores his identity as a sea resident. The lyrics thus supplement the other modes in explaining the character. Part of the song is included here:

You see, since birth, I have fought a dermatology disorder
 That has caused me sadness and woe, woe, woe
 Whenever other kids saw me under the sun's rays
 In no time they'll be calling me a freak or a raisin
 So I resigned myself to being left behind forever livin' in the H₂O
 (*Monkey King* 67: 10-67:40)

In summary, the reinterpretation of the Dragon King carries with it several implications. On the one hand, this character is re-envisioned as an arrogant rebel against non-marine creatures, a demanding ruler who lords over his subjects, and most important of all, a western dragon of evil and darkness, contrary to the auspicious mythological creature in the Chinese culture. On the other hand, he represents the American pop culture. This is done by sparking a debate on the bully and the bullied (land creatures as majorities and sea creatures

as minorities), narrating US core values of villains in an adapted Chinese figure, and obscuring the concept of “loong”, or the oriental dragon, with a semi-Chinese-and-semi-western counterpart.

Table 3: Multimodal adaptation of Dragon King

Modes	Spatial & Temporal Mode	Visual Mode	(Non)verbal Mode	Acoustic Mode	
Explicit Adaptation Approach	Storyline A storyline anew.	Color Purple suit; Green skin; Pink barbels	Linguistic features Narcissism Imperiousness Prejudice	Music Self-sung lyrics	
	Plot The stick under waters; Efforts to reclaim the stick; Relations with Heaven The swollen rebel; The miniaturized reptile; The devour of subjects; Benbo and Baboo.	Body Alligator mouth; Alligator eyes Fishtail; Fish scales; Thick furs; Sharp teeth; Deer horns; Frog legs.	Paralinguistic features Rhymed.		
	Scene No scene shifts to be analyzed	Residence Blue undersea palace	Non-verbal language The presence of a tub		
	Effects	Character Shaping	Story-telling		
	Implicit Adaptation Approach	Arrogant rebel	The bullied and the bully		
		Demanding superior	Western villain culture		
		Western dragon	Dragon in the west		
		
	(All modes and their adaptations are closely interwoven and mutually reciprocal)				

4.2.2. King Yama as Loyal Guardian

Unlike Dragon King, King Yama is presented as a guardian in this adaptation, who remains loyal to the Jade Emperor by watching over Hell and answering his call.

In the first mode, spatial and temporal changes are made. Firstly, King Yama, in contrast to the original, fights with Monkey not only in Hell but also outside at the bidding of the Jade Emperor, which signifies his obedience to Heaven, as reflected in his request for help from above: "I beseech you." Secondly, in another departure from the original, he is the *de facto* leader of Hell. In that sense, he rules on issues related to death and watches over two vital precious objects, the scroll, and the book. To do this, he conjures up clones of himself, and uses the brush and the stamp of doom, as he battles with Monkey. Thirdly, the door to Hell can only be opened by a portkey, which is found by Monkey in a graveyard. The scene shifts from the graveyard to a pathway down into Hell, showing an American version of Hell.

The visual image of King Yama is created in the second mode. With a bronze suit, he is red-faced, which is a sign of loyalty in the Chinese culture. Besides, he is stout with a bald head, crooked teeth, and small pupils, which are often signs of his bad temper. The places where he works include the Hall of Hell, where the ghosts wait to be registered for reincarnation, and the Room of Scrolls, where the records of mortals are kept. These two settings offer a clear picture of King Yama's responsibilities.

King Yama's words and gestures are examined in the third mode. For one thing, his words are often reflective of his irritation with his work and his subordination to Heaven. The first attitude is demonstrated by short words and segments addressed in high volume to ghosts, such as "Next!," "Release form!," "No one living allowed!," and the second by his respectful and apologetic words to his superior, such as "My lord", and "My bad." His gestures--drawing strokes, making stamps, summoning clones, and shooting arrows--all point to the performance of his duties.

These three modes all present the image of King Yama as a loyal keeper of Hell since he alone serves as the steward for registration, the guardian of the treasures, and the humble subordinate to his emperor. Through him, a glimpse of Hell in Chinese culture is offered, but the key to that place carries American

features, and Yama is more like the Grim Reaper in pop culture, who takes away the dead all alone.

Table 4: Multimodal adaptation of King Yama

Modes	Spatial & Temporal Mode	Visual Mode	(Non)verbal Mode	Acoustic Mode
	Storyline	Colors		
	The rearrangement of	Bronze suit; Red face and body;	Linguistic features Irritation Subjection	Music No music to be analyzed
	Plot	Body	Paralinguistic features	
	In Hell; Outside Hell; Relations with Heaven	Crooked front teeth; Bald round head;	High volume	
Explicit Adaptation Approach	Brush and stamp; “Clones”; The Book of Everlasting Life; Life and Death Scrolls.	Stout figure; Big fists; Egg eyes; Peanut pupils; V-shaped hair; Thick beard		
	Scene	Residence	Non-verbal language	
	The Door to Hell	Hell; The scroll room	Gestures of making combos	
Effects	Character Shaping		Story-telling	
	The steward		Non-traditional Chinese Hell	
	The guardian		Chinese death philosophy	
	The subordinate of Heaven			
	
Implicit Adaptation Approach	(All modes and their adaptations are closely interwoven and mutually reciprocal)			

4.3. Heaven: Two Head Immortals in Taoism

No longer arch-immortals in Heaven, the Jade Emperor and Wangmu are transformed in this adaptation into a “boss” and into a sorceress respectively.

4.3.1. *The Jade Emperor: A Multifaceted Ruler*

As the lord of immortals, the Jade Emperor is so multimodally adapted in this production that his image becomes rather complicated.

In the first mode, spatial and temporal changes are made around him. For one thing, he serves as a tool of scene shifts because of his high position and relations with other immortals. For example, the two kings report to him and he yields to Buddha regarding issues related to Monkey, where he intends to kill Monkey in the first place and Buddha thinks otherwise. For another, other plots are added to reflect his liking for banquets and parties, which are often planned by his advisors. When his position is challenged, he blows the Royal Horn of Desperation to summon immortals for help.

In the second mode, he is depicted as a Chinese monarch in red and gold traditional clothing, which are symbols of royalty. However, his appearance, as shown in Table 5, signifies a swollen, unorthodox ruler. His palace is made of clouds, which are less persuasive of his authority.

His verbal and non-verbal features are analyzed in the third mode below. In response to different immortals, his words vary on different occasions. For example, his words, mostly delivered in a calm tone, can be hilarious in party arrangements, indifferent in official business, and strict towards his subordinates concerning Monkey's quest for immortality. When it comes to parties and Monkey, however, his hand gestures and expressions can be dramatic, hinting at his excitement.

In the fourth mode, his presence is often accompanied by the sound of the Chinese classic instrument Guzheng. The music, reminiscent of flowing water, adds to the elegance and classical nature of Heaven.

In general, these explicit adaptations transform the Jade Emperor into a leisured host thirsty for entertainment and a pushy boss with poor management skills, which makes him more of a Westernized god. The adapted version also strengthens Buddhism's domination over Taoism, an implicit theme in the

original, since Buddha is pictured in this version as “the big guy” watching over all creatures, including the top Taoist, the Jade Emperor.

Table 5: Multimodal adaptation of the Jade Emperor

Modes	Spatial & Temporal Mode	Visual Mode	(Non)verbal Mode	Acoustic Mode
Explicit Adaptation Approach	Storyline	Color	Linguistic features	Music
	The rearrangement of order.	Red mianfu ¹⁰ ; Golden mianguan ¹¹ ; Purple eye shadow;	Entertainment; Pushiness; Indifference	Music played by Guzheng ¹² .
	Plot	Body	Paralinguistic features	
	Party & banquet;	Long face;	Calm tone	
	Attitude to Monkey;	Long ears;		
	Relations with Buddha;	Small eyes;		
	Relations with kings;	Stout triangular figure;		
	The Royal Horn of Desperation;	Small nose;		
	His advisors.	Thick neck (thicker than his head); Moustache;		
	Scene	Residence	Non-verbal language	
The Jade Emperor as the scenes shift	The Jade Palace	Dramatic gestures and expressions.		
Effects Implicit Adaptation Approach	Character Shaping		Story-telling	
	The host		Taoism under Buddhism;	
	The boss		Western-styled god	

¹⁰ It refers to the highest level of imperial gown worn by a Chinese emperor, king, or crown prince.

¹¹ It refers to the Chinese-styled imperial crown worn by an emperor or a king.

¹² It refers to a Chinese plucked zither or stringed instrument, the elegant sound of which is like that of flowing water.

...
 (All modes and their adaptations are closely interwoven and mutually
 reciprocal)

4.3.2. *Wangmu: Wicked Sorceress*

Unlike the original amiable character in the Chinese story, Wangmu is adapted here as a wicked sorceress in conflict with Monkey King, who is after her potions.

In the first mode, Wangmu appears in plots concerning Monkey King and his search for full immortality. In that sense, her Elixir of Immortality is the lure for Monkey, with whom she fights by using combos that include red lightning. The ingredients for immortality potion brewing also suggest her witchcraft and concepts derived from Chinese philosophy, such as the notion of qi¹³, instant karma.

In the second mode, the sorceress's image of Wangmu is constructed through her colors, appearance, and residence. In addition to her grey hair and green garments, her appearance, which includes sharp teeth, a triangular mouth, etc., represents a typical image of a witch. Her palace is also full of jars and bottles of ingredients used in witchcraft.

Her language and movements in the third mode, largely directed at Monkey, further supplement that image. In contrast with the original, her words and sharp voice are undignified and aggressive, e.g., her statement that "The thief's assistant is also a thief." Worse still, her battle with Monkey involves gestures and expressions that include a shocked face and a roll on the ground, which are far from graceful.

In a nutshell, through these explicit adaptations, Wangmu is depicted as an evil alchemist, working against the main protagonist. Her existence reflects the Western notion of witchcraft, which often grants its cult worshippers power and immortality, and the Chinese notion of immortality, which is traditionally achieved from cultivation.

¹³ Taoism believes that qi constitutes everything and the balance of different types of qi leads to harmony.

Table 6: Multimodal adaptation of Wangmu

Modes	Spatial & Temporal Mode	Visual Mode	(Non)verbal Mode	Acoustic Mode
Explicit Adaptation Approach	Storyline The rearrangement of order.	Color Grey hair; Green hanfu ¹⁴ ;	Linguistic features Indignity; Aggression.	Music No music to be analyzed
	Plot The Elixir of Immortality; Other ingredients Lightning.	Body Long and thin neck; Pear-shaped head; Small eyes Red chins; Sharp teeth; Pale face; Triangular mouth; Sout figure; Hair (round updo to untied); Forehead wrinkles.	Paralinguistic features Sharp voice.	
	Scene No scene shifts to be analyzed	Residence The Wangmu Palace	Non-verbal language Gestures and expressions in combat.	
Effects	Character Shaping		Story-telling	
Implicit Adaptation Approach	The evil alchemist ... (All modes and their adaptations are closely interwoven and mutually reciprocal)		Witchcraft and Chinese ways of immortality ...	

¹⁴ It refers to the traditional dress-like Chinese clothing, which has influenced clothing design in Eastern Asian countries like Japan and South Korea.

5. DEVIATION IN TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXT: HOW THE IMMORTAL WORLD HAS BEEN RESHAPED

Applying a multimodal analysis, it can be seen that the immortals are reconstructed explicitly and implicitly in this adaptation, which leads to discrepancies between the original and adapted versions. The deviation of immortal images, formed in a transnational context, can be understood from three perspectives.

First and foremost, *Monkey King* presents a miniature immortal world. In contrast to the original, this adapted version reduces the number of Taoist immortals to five, most of whom are not fully depicted. From immortals in high positions, they are adapted into lonely gods with few or no protectors, which weakens their status and authority. For example, the Jade Emperor has only four advisors for daily routines and entertainment, and Dragon King has only two tub-carriers, while Yama and Wangmu have no assistants at all. This renders the immortal world less procedurally majestic than in the original and the mythological system less complete for cross-cultural communication.

Second, the adapted immortals are not well aligned with their original prototypes. Indeed, some are rebuilt and based on other characters. For example, Yama's adaptation is based on both the original characters of the judge of Hell and the vanquisher of ghosts; the former keeps the scroll and the latter banishes ghosts with the stamp. Wangmu, however, is based on Lord Laozi¹⁵, who develops the Pills of Immortality. For another, their personalities change distinctively. They are all reshaped as gods with drama and emotions, which is far from nirvana, the highest form of enlightenment.

Finally, immortal adaptations are defined by American values. Monkey is endowed with a destiny but his arrogance is his nemesis. Dragon King, as a minority, is a rebel against mainstream norms. Yama is a steward without assistance, while his boss the Jade Emperor cares little but for his amusement activities. Wangmu is transformed from a gracious lady into a wild witch. All the

¹⁵ Laozi or Lao Tzu is the founder of Taoism. He is revered as one of Three Pure Ones or the three highest gods in the Taoist pantheon, but in *Journey to the West*, the Jade Emperor is the de facto leader of Heaven

adaptations prioritize American values and humor and neglect the true meaning of immortals, which is being supernatural and tolerant.

In general, the immortal world shown in *Monkey King* is an unfortunate misinterpretation of Chinese mythology. These adaptations in a transnational context have blurred and misunderstood the specific cultural elements of immortals in China and substituted pop American ideas and mentalities for the original mythological stories. This gives rise to an upside-down world of immortals, one with stereotypical Chinese characters and hardcore American values.

6. CONCLUSION

Concentrating on the adapted Netflix version of *Journey to the West*, this study has investigated the adaptations of five immortals in *Monkey King*, using a multimodal approach. This study relies on research in translation and adaptation, which is interdisciplinary in nature. Inspired by previous studies, this study has proposed a multimodal adaptation model, in which the immortals concerned can be examined via four modes and through two effects. More precisely, this study explores how immortals are adapted spatiotemporally, visually, verbally, and nonverbally, as well as acoustically. In the process of adaptation, the original storylines, plots, and scenes are rearranged, and the visual signs of colors and immortals' bodies and residences are redesigned. Also changed are immortals' verbal languages, both linguistic and paralinguistic, and their nonverbal languages. In addition to these, the presence of an immortal might be accompanied by certain music or sound. This study concludes that spatial and temporal, visual, verbal and nonverbal, and acoustic modes are explicitly interwoven and reciprocal in adapting immortal figures. They also implicitly inform the two effects examined here, namely character shaping and storytelling, which constitute the implicit multimodal adaptation in the model.

Through the lens of the model proposed, the five immortals are reconstructed in the adapted version multimodally: Monkey as the hero, Dragon King as the rebel, Yama as the guardian, the Jade Emperor as the "boss", and Wangmu as the witch. Bold as they might be, the adaptations made by Netflix represent distinct disparities from the mythological world in *Journey to the West*. As illustrated in the article, in addition to explicit distortions of their images in

four modes, all of the immortals are reshaped as characters quite different from the original and the stories they tell are, at their core, unreflective of Chinese culture and philosophies. Monkey becomes a lonely and aggressive outcast with a sense of self-righteousness, Dragon King a rebel seeking to overthrow Heaven, Yama a guardian incompetent to guard treasures, the Jade Emperor a bossy superior, and Wangmu a wicked owner of the Elixir of Immortality. Not only have they been deleted, simplified, and integrated, but the five immortals have been packaged to reflect pop and mainstream US values, with the immortal world rendered obscure, and Chinese Taoist worldviews negligible.

In this sense, this study offers a new dimension for evaluating adaptations of Chinese literature in a transnational context, focusing on how the reconstructions were made and their deviations from the sources and those sources' cultures. Taking the case study of the immortals as an example, this article explores adaptations from a multimodal perspective, evaluating the effect of those cross-cultural adaptations on the original culture.

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