

Literature on Screen: The Asian graphic novels and films adaptation

Mou Bingying, PhD student

English Literature

Silliman University, Philippines

Abstract

*Within the last decades, there has been a burgeoning field of film studies, especially the topic of study is the adaption of literary classics to film. One medium that combines affordances of both visuals and text - a graphic novel. A book with comic book content is a graphic novel. The phrase "graphic novel" is used generically to apply to fiction, non-fiction, and anthologized works, despite the fact that the word "novel" often refers to lengthy fictional works.¹ In general, Will Eisner's *A Contract with God*, which was finally released in 1978, contributed to the phrase "graphic novel" becoming widely used. Eisner's book and Art Spiegelman's *Maus* were particularly significant in this regard. When it comes to Asian graphic novels, in Japan, it means Japanese manga and in Taiwan, China, it refers to picture books. In this paper, I am going to explore the different presentations of imagery and relationships between graphic novel and its adapted film.*

Key words: Film and literature, graphic novel, film adaption

Eastern comics or graphic novels on the other hand have been led by Japan. Japanese comics or graphic novels known as manga, have become a huge cultural influence in Japanese society and the industry. Hayao Miyazaki's and Jimmy Liao's graphic novels have become a typical example of successful film adaptations of literary works under the trend of film distribution. His 2001 movie *Spirited Away*, which won the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature at the 75th Academy Awards, broke all box office records in Japan and is usually listed as one of the best movies of the 2000s. *Spirited Away* is rife with Japanese folklore, history, and symbolism, as Miyazaki himself noted.² In the animation industry today, there are not many who still practicing traditional animation technique, the hand drawn cel animation. However, Hayao Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli animation is the prominent example that traditional animation has redeemed its place in the digital era which obtained successful result and very much welcome in animation cinema.³ This article will focus on the different presentations of imagery in Hayao Miyazaki's and Jimmy Liao's graphic novels and film adaptations.

1. Synopsis of the novel and film of *Spirited Away*

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graphic_novel

² "Spirited Away": Film of the Fantastic and Evolving Japanese Folk Symbols, Noriko T. Reider

³ Hayao Miyazaki as Auteur: Techniques, Technology and Aesthetics in Animation. Bin Yee Ang

Miyazaki Hayao's *Spirited Away* is the adaption of graphic novel to animation film. The genre is directly related to manga, the graphic novels read by millions of Japanese, both children and adults.⁴ The masterpiece of the famous Japanese animation director Hayao Miyazaki tells the story of a 10-year-old girl, Chihiro, who accidentally enters the world of the spirits and grows up through a series of trials and tribulations. Her parents have been magically transformed into pigs by eating food offered to the spirits. In order to save her parents, she bravely signs a work contract with the witch Yubaba, stay and work in the Oil House, the bathhouse run by the witch. When she signed the contract with the witch, the name "Chihiro" was taken away from her and changed to "Sen", giving her the name of this work. So the title of this work is *Spirited Away*. The graphic novel begins like this: A sulky 10-year-old Japanese girl Chihiro and her family are relocating from the city to a rural area. They wander into a now-closed theme park, now known as the Yuya, as they are traveling to their new house. When her parents set out to explore the park, they unexpectedly discovered a food stand open but unattended after crossing a dry riverbed. They start devouring food like there's no tomorrow, but Chihiro refuses to join them as they are eating and cautiously scans the area. In the reality, a rapacious witch named Yubaba constructed it as a recreation area in the spiritual realm. Chihiro's parents are transformed into pigs by the witch's curse, Yubaba steals Chihiro's name and gives her a new name – Sen. Sen is given the challenging task of cleaning the bathhouse, but Lynn, a young woman, and Kama-j, an elderly guy in charge of the boiler room, make him friends. Other weird entities Sen meets include three bouncing bodyless heads, a sumo-sized creature with fingers like radishes, and ghosts wearing traditional court clothes and white square masks. In addition, there are non-human (but human-like) monsters like "frog men," a massive white dragon, and an enigmatic black, shadowy, conflicted person known as "No Face." Sen gradually succeeds in being brave and maintaining her composure while maintaining grace under pressure in a variety of terrifying and potentially dangerous situations. As the tale goes, she meets a mysterious boy named Haku at the Yuya, and with his assistance, the timid girl has learned to deal with the hardships of the distressing spirit world. At the same time, she eventually assists Haku in remembering his original name—that is, his true identity—while he is a white dragon in his other form. Sen eventually succeeds in passing a final test given to her by Yubaba, keeping in mind that her real name is Chihiro, and is able to depart from this strange location. She is instructed to find her parents among some pigs, but notices that all of them are not her parents, and she soon meets up with her actual human parents, who had been concerned about where Chihiro was. Her parents are perplexed when they leave the theme park and return through the lengthy tunnel-like passageway to find their car lightly dusted with dirt and debris. As they depart, her father inquires if she is okay Whether she can handle the difficulties of a new home and school is something that is only addressed in the film's English dub. Chihiro answers with more assurance, "I think I can handle it." The film has managed to include every single image in the book with a high level of accuracy, although some are fleeting. The adapted film is faithful to the original

⁴ Krikke J. Computer graphics advances the art of anime. *IEEE Comput Graph Appl.* 2006 May-Jun;26(3):14-9. doi: 10.1109/mcg.2006.53. PMID: 16711212.

book, with some dialogue and scene articulation added as appropriate for a perfect film production presentation and story integration. The injection of these details enhances the artistic impact and warmth of the film. For example, in the first scene of the film, there is added dialogue between mother and Chihiro, she said to her mother, the flowers wilted, this presents the mood of the young girl at that time. This brings the audience into that scene. Another added film scene is when Chihiro goes to meet Haku, but she cannot find her shoes, then those soot sprites appear from their caves to carry her shoes to let her wear, that moment is so warm, isn't it?

2. Analysis of Turn left, turn right

The second graphic novel comes from Taiwan, China. Traditionally graphic novel is more and more popular during the last decades in Europe and America, especially lead by America, it is, at least in the United States, typically distinct from the term comic book, which is generally used for comics periodicals and trade paperbacks. The term gained popularity in the comics community after the publication of Will Eisner's *A Contract with God* (1978) and the start of Marvel's Graphic Novel line (1982) and became familiar to the public in the late 1980s after the commercial successes of the first volume of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* in 1986, the collected editions of Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* in 1986 and Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen* in 1987. The Book Industry Study Group began using graphic novel as a category in book stores in 2001.⁵ As graphic novel travels around Asia, in Japan, it refers to manga, and in Taiwan China, it is called picture book. Jimmy Liao, whose Chinese name is Fubin Liao, is a Taiwan illustrator as well as a picture book writer. His graphic book *Turn Left, Turn Right*, which was published in 1999, and also adapted for a 2003 romance film of the same name *Turn Left, Turn Right*, filmed in Taipei, Taiwan. The original graphic novel was first published in 1999. The characters in the novel were not given name, both characters were only referred to as "he" and "she". She decides to leave the deserted cold city and he decides to travel to a sunny place. Dragging their bags they meet again at the fountain. The sky begins to clear and the lilting sounds of Christmas Eve songs drift in the distance. *Turn Left, Turn Right* is a love story of city, a book dedicated by Jimmy Liao to those who are destined to meet. He and she live in the same apartment building in the same city. Whenever they go out, it is customary for her to go to the left and him to go to the right. Never meeting each other. They walked the same street, fed the same stray cat, held the same child, ran home in the same rain, listened to the same radio, the same loneliness. She always walked to the left, he always walked to the right. They never met either, like so many people in this city. But then one day they met, in front of the fountain in the park, like lovers who had been separated for years. They were convinced that it was an instant burst of passion that brought them together. A grey winter became as brilliant as the rape flowers in spring. But a sudden downpour separated them, the note with the phone number was blurred in the rain, and they were separated again in a city. Look for each other. Even though he

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graphic_novel

would optimistically believe that, like the plot of a movie, he would meet her at the next corner of the street, or at a roadside café. But as the days went by, neither of them met each other. Searching for a strange and familiar figure in a strange and familiar city. Such days make one feel helpless and lonely. So as the seasons change, the rainy season of the soul arrives. The muddy air of the city, the broken pedestrian streets, the red lights that take too long and the buses that are always off duty make people feel like the leaden grey clouds over the city.

Turn Left Turn Right is a beautiful vision of romantic love for the modern city dwellers. The prosperity of the modern city brings with it the Luxury and enjoyment, but also the indifference of steel and concrete. People living in the city are as busy as ants. But we all carry a dream in our hearts - the dream of meeting a long-awaited love at the end of the corner in the street one day. The simple composition, pure colors, blue melancholy, yellow loneliness and countless misses create a tender and gentle love story for us. Separated in the heavy rain and reunited in the snow, it feels like the hero and heroine are actually living reality, really close to us. In the dampness of winter, do you also feel the inexplicable frustration and urge to shed tears? Do you also look at the clear sky and feel blue for no reason at all? In this familiar yet unfamiliar city, have you also searched for a strange yet familiar figure? Open "Turn Left Turn Right" and listen together to the loneliness in the hearts of boy and girl, experience the surprises and lassitude of life, touch the memories and feelings in your heart, and grasp the chance encounters and love in your own life

In the story, two persons who are constantly close to one another and live in buildings adjacent to one another, divided only by a wall, struggle to find each other. John Liu is a freelance violinist who goes from job to job. Eve Choi works at a book publishing company as a translator. When Eve's papers fall into the park fountain, John accidentally introduces them when he helps her retrieve them. They learn that they first met at an amusement park when they were younger when both of their schools had planned field trips to the same location. Eve had previously asked John for his phone number, but the two were unable to communicate as a result of Eve leaving her luggage on the train and forgetting to take a note of it. Before immediately dispersing due to an impending downpour, the two exchange phone numbers without asking for each other's names and joke over the past. The two are dismayed to learn the next day that the phone numbers they had exchanged are unintelligible as a result of the paper being wet during the storm. Due to their frustration at not being able to find each other, John and Eve decide to pursue employment abroad. The wall separating their apartment is destroyed by an earthquake on the day they are scheduled to depart Taiwan. Both eventually they come across each other.

3. From novel to film

Novel and film are two different forms of cultural and emotional expression, with novel providing the source of creation for film, and film providing the inspiration for the re-creation of

literary works. The sensory stimulation, aesthetic experience and emotional expression brought to the audience by the two are different.

3.1 The reshaping of characters and images

Recreating the characters can be described as a novel's core element. A novel can be said to be about characterisation, telling a story and conveying emotion, so in a novel characterisation requires descriptions of appearance, language, behavior and psychological activity, and so does a film. Most film adaptations take great care to recreate the characters.

The primary distinction between a novel and a movie is that while written words can indirectly excite our perceptions, visual visuals do so directly. Unlike reading, watching a movie involves more immediate sensory input, including color, movement, and sound in addition to vocal discourse.⁶

Chihiro, the protagonist of *Spirited Away*, is a growing character. The author has not only portrayed her growing personality, but also her original selfishness and cowardice is portrayed in great detail in the opening scene, as she is never a perfect child, which makes her growth all the more valuable. The characterisation of the two sisters, Yubaba and Zeniba, is a divergent one. The confrontation between the two sisters is not only a conflict that drives the plot, but also a metaphor and a reflection for the audiences to explore. Perhaps they are representatives of industrial civilization and agrarian civilization, or perhaps they are representatives of Western culture and Eastern culture. The author's intention is to convey through the characters that true growth is perhaps a return to the basics. There are a thousand Hamlets in a thousand people's eyes, and the characters are live, and live in the film. They are alive and can bring the structure of the story together. In the novel *Turn left, turn right*, there is no plot which they first met as little boy and girl. In keeping with the spirit of the original, the adaptation enriches the original plot.

3.2 Re-imagining of novel scenes in film

The restoration and addition of scenes from novels is also an important part of film and television adaptations. The descriptions of scenes in novels rely more on the imagination of readers, and each reader has his or her own subjective perception of the objective images described in the books, while film and television dramas present these images objectively, and the audience can only passively accept them, but can no longer subjectively imagine them. In the film of *Spirited away*, Chihiro helped a Soot Sprite to carry the briquettes, others Soot Sprites all want her to help them, and Kamaji got angry with Chihiro, other Soot Sprites help her.

3.3 Fidelity and creativity

⁶ ADAPTATION: FROM NOVEL TO FILM,
https://d2buyft38glmwk.cloudfront.net/media/cms_page_media/11/FITC_Adaptation_1.pdf

The main story lines of these two novels have not been significantly altered in their adaptation to film, and the film adaptation is very good at describing the images and telling the story; it gives the audience a sense of immersion into the story. Due to the differences between film and novel in terms of presentation, there are inevitably some differences between film and novel and the original in the process of adaptation. The process of creating a novel is no easier than that of a film drama, and a novel contains the author's heart and soul, so film practitioners must have a certain sense of responsibility and not lose their principles by catering to the audience. Meanwhile, Film adaptations reinterpret novels and facilitate a deeper understanding of the work. To compare these two Asian graphic novels, *Spirited Away* is adapted into animated film and *Turn left, Turn right* is adapted into real romance film. The term "fidelity" refers to the degree to which a literary work has been faithfully (or inaccurately) adapted for the screen. Both adapted films capture "the spirit" of the original text. Consider *Spirited away* adaptation of Miyazaki Hayao's novel. This is quite a faithful film by the standards of story fidelity. The main events and characters, while simplified, are preserved—even all of the dialogue survives unchanged. Some details are changed, for example, the novel *Spirited Away* is end with Chihiro looking back the tunnel and film ended with her father inquires if she is okay, Chihiro answers with more assurance, "I think I can handle it." The end of *Turn left, turn right*, novel is end with they meet at the fountain again, but the film is end with the earthquake happened, and the only wall between them clasped, they meet again. To the degree that a film is faithful or not to the textual specificity of a literary work (the narrative voice and textual style, as well as characters, settings, and plots) or to the "spirit" of that original, cinematic adaptations will always measure both the power of film – to assimilate, to transform, to distort, or to overcome – the specifics of that source material.⁷

In some cases, the story of a literary work poses special kinds of challenges. Sometimes a literary work offers contradictory or highly compressed descriptions of events. A straightforward adaptation that seeks to preserve the presentation of the original's events will need to make inventive choices.⁸ It sometimes takes a lot of imagination and ingenuity to convey the same fictional propositions to viewers in the same order because of the distinctions between works of literature and films as media, including the temporal, visual, and aural components of films.

4. Cultural perspectives in film adaptations of graphic novels

As a literary genre, the novel is a cultural carrier, containing and transmitting the spiritual connotations of a nation; as an important form of media communication, film plays a tool for transmitting ideologies, values and lifestyles, and film adaptations of novels spread the spiritual

⁷ Literature on Screen, A History: In the Gap Timothy Corrigan

⁸ The Value of Fidelity in Adaptation, James Harold, The British Journal of Aesthetics, Volume 58, Issue 1, January 2018, Pages 89–100, <https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayx041>

culture contained in the original to the world. Kotodama, a widely held myth in Japan about the spirit of language, is the idea that the Japanese language possesses some kind of supernatural force. This notion has its roots in ancient Shintoist ceremony, but it has persisted throughout Japanese history, and the term "kotodama" is still often used in casual conversation. The term kotodama literally means "the spirit of language" (koto = language, dama (tama) = spirit or soul). It is a belief based on the idea of Shintoism, the indigenous religion of Japan which worships divinity in all natural creation and phenomena.⁹ Language was thought to have a spirit in ancient Japan; this spirit bestowed positive power on positive words and negative power on negative words, and it also had an effect on a person's life when their name was said aloud. As a result, wishes or curses were expressed in a certain way to reach the divine forces.

This anime demonstrates a deep devotion to "names." They believe that after a length of time in the other world, the spirits will return to the human realm and resume their lives. As a result, when a person who resembles an ancestor arrives in the family, it is regarded as a reincarnation of the ancestor, and the ancestor's name is therefore passed on to the next generation. This rite of rebirth is closely linked to the ritual of naming. As a sign, the name takes on a more spiritual connotation here. It is the link between the past and the present, the emblem of life, the one that moves from one realm to another and then to the next. This cycle from the present world to the other world and back again is the world view that is profoundly established in Japanese society. Their lives contain a long past and a limitless future, and existence inevitably becomes a miracle in the word. This contrasts greatly with the modern man who is just concerned with himself. Future generations are not given the names of elders in Bengali families, and Indian mothers are not allowed to have the names of their own dead in their houses. It is forbidden to keep a family member's name on display in the house. In contrast to these, the name becomes a totem in Japanese society, a symbolic mark of speech. It is an object of worship and has mystical powers. This can be seen in the most popular anime in Japan today. Japanese anime has always had its own unique connotations, as it incorporates the magic of various beliefs that are deeply rooted in the traditions of Japanese society.

The film *Spirited Away* has a deep cult of the name, which was taken away from her by the witch Yubaba. In the same way that she forgets her name, Chihiro also forgets her life in the real world. "Once a name is taken away, there is no way to find your way home", Haku said. When he gives Chihiro the clothes she came in with and a piece of paper with her name on it, tell her to keep it. The implication of this setting is that a name is proof that a person lives in a world. Yubaba forces Chihiro to change her name. The purpose of forcing Chihiro to change her name to 'Sen' is to keep her, to make her forget her own name and who she is, so that Chihiro can become a form of the otherworldly person who works for her for the rest of her life. The name, in this case, becomes a symbol of the connection with the real world. The name is one of the

⁹ Kotodama: the multi-faced Japanese myth of the spirit of language, Naoko Hosokawa.

most crucial points of contact between her and the original world. The belief kotodama is re-presented in the belief that names as speech symbols, "systems of symbols, are not to be understood and interpreted merely as simple manifestations of the human mind that tend in many different directions and that permeate the realm of our spiritual life."

The cultural vocabulary of this film contains a lot of folk and Shrine Shinto ideas. The film's director, Hayao Miyazaki, expressly acknowledges his thanks to this custom. He mentions, for instance, his "very warm gratitude for the many, very simple rural Shinto ceremonies that are still practiced today every day in rural Japan " and mentions the villager-led solstice rites where they summon encourage everyone and every local kami to take a bath in their baths. Evidently, this served as inspiration for the bathhouse setting in the film, and his allusion to the kami evokes the core of the Shinto religion. An overview of some fundamental tenets of the Shinto worldview will offer a general foundation for comprehending the film and its numerous plot points and characters.

In essence, everyone of us is in control of our attitudes and deeds; we may either give in to unfortunate circumstances or make an effort, no matter how tough, to "clean up" issues and elevate our situation. The idea of developing a sound, pure heart and mind is a major topic in Miyazaki's "Spirited Away," which follows Chihiro's transformation from a miserable small kid to a young adult who behaves with genuine sincerity toward people and the world. This spiritual metamorphosis is compellingly portrayed by Miyazaki.¹⁰ The idea of developing a sound, pure heart and mind is a major topic in Miyazaki's "Spirited Away," which charts Chihiro's transformation from a miserable small kid to a young adult who behaves with genuine sincerity toward people and the world. This spiritual metamorphosis is compellingly portrayed by Miyazaki. He immerses Chihiro in the fantastical world of Yubaba, Haku, and the bathhouse, where she is tested and grows a pure and joyful heart through her hardships, enabling her to assist her companion Haku in recalling his true identity. By relating the film to the Shinto viewpoints previously mentioned and closely examining the Japanese version, one is able to comprehend Chihiro's character development in a relational rather than individualistic context and better understand the significance of tradition for Miyazaki.

The kami in Spirited Away typically embody an element of the natural world—such as a radish, spider, or river—and this manner of depicting natural spirits ties directly to traditional folk beliefs and one of the major Japanese religions—Shinto.¹¹ In Jimmy Liao's Turn left, turn right, the illnesses of the protagonists are always urban illnesses. They themselves are lonely, confused and anxious, and this emotion is the natural outgrowth of their petty reality status, their

¹⁰ Shinto Perspectives in Miyazaki's Anime Film "Spirited Away" in Miyazaki's Anime Film "Spirited Away" James W. Boyd Colorado State University, jwboyd@lamar.colostate.edu

¹¹ Tradition vs. Innovation and the Creatures in Spirited Away, Emma Hartman,

emotions are contradictory, and they themselves are "painful and happy", and their fetishism and melancholia are a cover-up and false comfort for this emotional contradiction. It is in these contradictory emotions that the work of several meters finds its artistic inspiration. Undoubtedly, with his own care and artistic mastery, he writes about the confusion of a specific group of people in the city, shaping the emotional aesthetics of that group. People are feeling and reaping their joys and sorrows.

Conclusion

Before coming to a conclusion and in order to form a whole picture of the dissertation, it is necessary to recall the graphic novels and film adaptation. With the rapid development of graphic novel in Europe and America, graphic novel in Asia has its own national ethnic cultural development characteristics. Japanese manga and Chinese picturebooks find their own way to make successful film adaptation. Film and literature have always been closely linked, and the question of how to make the two coexist harmoniously in the age of images or graphics have become a hot topic of academic research at present. As the most popular master of cartoons, Hayao Miyazaki's and Jimmy Liao's works are very conducive to the expression of film language due to the intensive creation of imagery, both in terms of visual presentation and ideological connotation.

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