

# Film Adaptation as A New Medium in Understanding Literature

Sudirman Kiffli<sup>1,a)</sup>, Nasirin Abdillah<sup>1,b)</sup> and Farrah Atikah Saari<sup>1,c)</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Fakulti Teknologi Kreatif dan Warisan, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Kampus Bachok, 16300 Bachok, Kelantan, Malaysia.*

Corresponding author: <sup>a)</sup>sudirman.k@umk.edu.my

<sup>b)</sup>nasirin@umk.edu.my

<sup>c)</sup>atikah.s@umk.edu.my

**Abstract.** A literary work, conventionally, can exist in an oral or writing form that requires its readers to listen and read in order to comprehend. This conventional concept of enjoying literary works has resulted in the waning interest to be involved in literature among the younger generation. It is deemed pivotal that adaptations of literature into films may attract the attention of this generation in order to understand a literary work. Based on this notion, this study aims at bringing to the fore the importance of film adaptation so as to comprehend the adaptation concept, analyse film adaptation in Malaysia and evaluate its significance to whom it may concern. It is discovered preliminarily, in this study that the adaptation process is essential in the efforts to enhance understanding of literary works among readers. It is hoped that this study may open up more discussions on the film adaptation and further embrace its impacts on society as film is one of the powerful technological tools that notably characterises the 4.0 Industrial Revolution (4IR).

## INTRODUCTION

The advancement of information technology as a result of industrial revolution has further accelerated the emergence of the 4.0 Industrial Revolution (4IR) and subsequently it has influenced developments of knowledge and fields of studies. The field of literature has also been impacted by this industrial revolution. This has resulted in a new development of literature so as to ensure it is relevant today. In other words, this development has paved a new way in the world of literature so that people can accept literature amidst the technological progress. Information technology has become a new medium in instilling and presenting literary works to the mass. In this context, works of literature can be transmitted via various technological media such as television drama, film, animation and electronic games, just to name a few. This shows the flexibility of literature as it can ‘appear’ in other fields of knowledge or disciplines. This study will discuss the role of film adaptation as a new medium in understanding a literary text. Based on this premise, the discussions will focus on the elements of adaptation approach by examining several examples of film adaptations in Malaysia. Apart from this, aspects related to the significance of film adaptation production will be scrutinised so as to further understand how film adaptation as a new medium can interpret literary works.

## BACKGROUND OF STUDY

The production of film adaptations based on literary works has started gaining momentum in Malaysia. Each year, there is an increase of film adaptation production by some local production houses. The literary works that have been adapted into films are from various literary genres especially from novels. This situation proves that there is a demand by the public on film adaptations of literary works. It is thus noted that the production of film adaptation has potentially expanded the horizon of literature. It is also interesting to observe that the literary film adaptation is a new medium in offering better understanding of literature. This can be seen in the high demand for filmic or visual literature as the

new medium in Malaysian context, as compared to the dwindling number of purchase of printed literary books as the conventional medium. This research further discusses the upward trend of film adaptation in this country.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study will focus on several objectives based on the reviews of literature. These objectives will be the main guidelines in this research. The research objectives are as follows:

- 1) Identifying latest film adaptations in Malaysia.
- 2) Discussing other researches concerning film adaptations in Malaysia.
- 3) Analysing the significance of film adaptation as a new medium to understand literary works.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative method. A textual analysis is the main instrument in discussing and analysing previous researches thus this may contribute to identifying the problem statement which can be further translated into the research objectives. Besides, printed and online references will be sought in order to conduct a thorough research on the subject matter. There is also a need for a discussion on the adaptation approach because such approach is relatively new in Malaysian context. It is noted the approaches applied in the previous studies, mainly focused on the narrative aspect. On the other hand, the adaptation approach has received less attention among scholars. It is thus through this research, the central focus will be on the adaptation aspect as a new medium in understanding literature.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In understanding the context of the research, several past studies are discussed and examined that also function as guidelines in conducting this research. Among the relevant previous studies on film adaptation, Hani Salwah Yaakup (2018) discusses aspects of adaptation with regard to Ramlee Awang Murshid's novel, *Tombiruo Penunggu Rimba*. The novel was adapted into a film using the same title and it was directed by Seth Larney in 2017. Hani Salwah Yaakup's research focusses on the aspect of the community's belief representation, that is the Dusun community in Sabah [1, 2].

Sohaimi Abdul Aziz focusses on the adaptation elements in which there are relevant methods used when adapting a literary work into a filmic representation. He examines the film, *Laskar Pelangi*, which is based on a novel Riri Riza. In this study, Sohaimi Abdul Aziz applies four levels of film adaptation analysis: from the narrative level, verbal to visual, enunciation and to the whole production [12]. Through these four levels, his study concludes that there is a close relation between the filmmaker and the novelist. It is clear that his research focusses mainly on the structural or narrative elements that have been transferred from the novel to the film.

Mohamad Azmi Bin Ab. Rahman and Phat A/L Awang in their article discuss the thematic aspect and issues conveyed in a film adaptation based on a Malaysian popular novel, *Ombak Rindu*. In the study, they examine the similarities and differences between the two media, the novel and the film where the thematic aspect especially on social issues becomes the central discussion in examining the roles of the film director and the novelist [5].

Apart from all these, Siti Hasmah Wan Teh (2015) through her article, examines the adaptation approach as suggested by Klein and Parker. Her study focusses on the interpretation aspect of the film director, U-Wei Haji Shaari, in relation to the film, *Jogho*, which was based on the novel, *Juara*, by S. Othman Kelantan. The research looks at how a film director interprets a literary work thus highlighting the aspect of interpretation [10].

Nur Azliza Mohd Nor and Nur Afifah Vanitha Abdullah (2017) have also discussed several U-Wei Haji Shaari's film adaptations. Their research concludes that U-Wei Haji Shaari's films that have been adapted from literature, have a tendency to deal with the feminist issues. Aspects of feminism are central in portraying women images in the films directed by him. In this manner, the feminist approach is more dominant as compared to other approaches in his film adaptations [8].

Furthermore, Nur Azliza Mohd Nor and Nur Afifah Vanitha Abdullah (2019) explore the aspect of women degradation or discrimination in U-Wei Haji Shaari's film adaptations [9]. In this study, they apply the approach by Hooks (1993) where there are two main factors that contribute to women discrimination: social institution and sexism. Through this approach, the researchers conclude that the main character, Mas Ayu in the film, *Black Widow Wajah Ayu*, as well as in the novel, has been discriminated and ostracised by the society due to being labelled as a 'bastard'

– a child of born out of wedlock. Thus, the main finding of this research reiterates Hooks’ ideas as portrayed both in the novel and film.

Mohamed Nazreen Shahul Hamid and Md. Salleh Yaapar (2015) discuss the narrative aspects of *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* in both the film adaptation and the traditional Malay text. In the study, they apply a research approach as proposed by Desmond and Hawkes. It is concluded that the film has ‘loosely’ adapted the old Malay text. They observe that the director and the script writer have made significant changes thus the film has failed to adhere to the original text. Through the examination of the narrative aspects, there are parts that have been omitted and added in the production of the film [6].

Moreover, Mohamed Nazreen Shahul Hamid and Md. Salleh Yaapar (2020) also scrutinised the historical aspects in a film adaptation. They examine the truthfulness of the history of the Patani kingdom in the film, *Queens of Langkasuka*. It is discovered through this research that the production of *Queens of Langkasuka* has made noticeable changes to the history of Patani, an ancient Malay kingdom located in the Southern Thailand. There are several aspects omitted or intentionally added in the film. Their research looks at the historical issues from a comparative context. It is concluded that *Queens of Langkasuka* is a film adaptation of a cinematic art that is independent from the any historical facts concerning Patani [7].

## DISCUSSION

The discussion in this section will put emphasis on several points so as to better understand the elements of film adaptations as a new medium to comprehend literary works. The following points will provide answers to the objectives of this research.

### Understanding the Concept of Film Adaptation

Adaptation is a research field or discipline developed by the previous scholars especially from the west. They have conducted researches and provided details on the film adaptation concept. Generally, an adaptation can refer to a process that changes written or oral literary texts into new forms such as films, video games and other visual arts. According to Sohaimi Abdul Aziz (2013), any printed literary works can be conveyed via the new media especially film which is characteristically visual. Thus literary texts can appear in filmic visualisation through the process of adaptation. It can also be said that the adaptation in this context is a process that has changed literature into a new medium using technology [12].

Adaptation is also a process of offering new interpretations to works of literature. These new interpretations occur when one or several filmmakers produce(s) films based on their readings and understanding of literary works and get them translated in the form of visual representation. Such opinion is a reiteration of what Linda Hutcheon (2003) has said about adaptation: “...adapting is a process of appropriation, of taking possession of another narrative, of abducting it, if you like, for one’s own creative purposes.” It can be surmised that adaptation is a process of changing or modifying a text in order to produce a new creative work. The process of modifying written or oral literary texts is easier in the hands of filmmakers as they are readily available with their own narrative structure as opposed to gauging totally new scripts. Adaptation as a whole, is thus a process to translate any literary reference either written or oral into a new form, that is film [3, 4].

### Acceptance of Film Adaptation in Malaysia

Based on the review of past studies, there has been a number of film adaptations produced in Malaysia and scholars have analysed them from various aspects. Such interaction signifies the acceptance of film adaptation in this country. In addition, this research pays a special attention on film adaptations with a focus on examining the function of film adaptation as a new medium in understanding literature. This study will look at several film adaptations that have been produced in Malaysia from 2010 to 2020.

**TABLE 1.** List of Film Adaptations in Malaysia from 2011 to 2020 from National Film Development Corporation Malaysia.

No.	Title of Film Adaptation	Year of Production	Original Text
1.	<i>Legenda Budak Setan</i>	2010	<i>Legenda Budak Setan</i>
2.	<i>Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa</i>	2011	<i>Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa</i>
3.	<i>Ombak Rindu</i>	2011	<i>Ombak Rindu</i>
4.	<i>Tombiruo: Penunggu Rimba</i>	2017	<i>Tombiruo: Penunggu Rimba</i>
5.	<i>Pulang</i>	2018	<i>Pulang</i>

Based on Table 1 above, the Malaysian film industry has produced several films adapted from literary works. Though it seems that all films are adapted from, mostly novels, there are differences, especially in terms of themes. For instance, *Ombak Rindu* is based on a modern novel that portrays elements of romance and family issues whilst *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*, which is based on a traditional Malay text, depicts the bravery of warriors and the idea of defending one's country from pirate invasion. On the other hand, there is *Tombiruo: Penunggu Rimba* that deals with aspects of communal belief and ecology. This situation has proven that film adaptations have been well received by Malaysians. Furthermore, based on the report by the National Film Development Corporation Malaysia (FINAS), the film adaptations have been successful due to the encouraging ticket sales at the Malaysian Box Office, as shown in the following Table 2.

**TABLE 2.** List of Grossing Film Adaptations in Malaysia from 2010 to 2020 from National Film Development Corporation Malaysia.

No.	Title of Film Adaptation	Year of Production	Gross (RM/Million)
1.	<i>Legenda Budak Setan</i>	2010	RM 4.28 million
2.	<i>Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa</i>	2011	RM 6.50 million
3.	<i>Ombak Rindu</i>	2011	RM 10.90 million
4.	<i>Tombiruo: Penunggu Rimba</i>	2017	RM 7.97 million
5.	<i>Pulang</i>	2018	RM 2.3 million

The above Table 2 shows the gross profit of each film adaptation in Malaysia from 2010 to 2020. It is also shown that all films grossed more than RM 1 Million with *Ombak Rindu*, which was based on Fauziah Ashari's novel, has the highest grossing film adaptation in Malaysia with RM 10.90 Million. The second highest grossing film goes to *Tombiruo: Penunggu Rimba* from Ramlee Awang Murshid's novel with RM 7.97 Million. *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*, which was based on a traditional Malay text, earned RM 6.50 Million, followed by *Legenda Budak Setan* with RM 4.28 Million, which was based on a novel by Ahadiat Akashah. Last but not least is *Pulang* with an income of RM 2.3 Million, which was based on a creative work by Lily Haslina Nasir. The statistics indicates that Malaysian film adaptations are well-received and moviegoers seem to support and appreciate this kind of film. The gross profits may still be pale in comparison with Hollywood, but by the local standard, these film adaptations are doing well at the Malaysian box office. It can be discerned that there should more serious efforts of making more film adaptations thus further spark the interest of literature among Malaysians.

### **The Need for Film Adaptation from Literary Works**

Films adapted from works of literature should be multiplied in production because there is a high demand for this kind of film. Such a positive acceptance may signal the need for collaborations between filmmakers and the creative writers so as to increase the film adaptation productivity. It should also be noted that the filmmakers may consider implementing the aesthetical aspects in the films without jeopardising the commercial values in order to meet the audience's demands. Moreover, there are several basics needed in film adaptations.

These are the three main basics:

- 1) The narrative value of a literary text
- 2) The commercial aspect of a literary text and its writer(s)
- 3) The demands of current audience or generation.

The narrative value of a text should be pondered upon in the production of film adaptations. A creative writer may have constructed his or her work with an interesting narrative structure thus making a great literary work that may attract a wider readership. Subsequently, such excellent works of literature may be appealing to readers. A strong connection with the readers perhaps is due to the meticulous aspect of narrative in the story. It is then suggested that filmmakers need to establish close relations with the creative in producing better quality of film adaptations. For example, the success of *Ombak Rindu* is due to excellent collaborations between the novelist, Fauziah Ashari and the director, Osman Ali. Thus, there is the need for understanding literary works in the production of film adaptations.

The commercial aspect should also be taken into consideration when making film adaptations based on works of literature. It is an established notion that certain literary works, particularly novels, may have their own readers or followers. For instance, the famous Malaysian novelist, Ramlee Awang Murshid, has his own huge fans. They will always support his novels thus making him one of the best-selling authors in Malaysia. Ramlee Awang Murshid's Instagram has a strong support with 15.7 thousand followers thus certifying his popularity as a novelist. His fans even created Ramlee Awang Murshid Fan Club (RAMFC) on Facebook with more than 144 thousand followers. In this sense, novels written by Ramlee Awang Murshid, have their commercial values that filmmakers can tap into. It is then no surprise that the success of the film *Tombiruo: Penunggu Rimba* in 2017, based on one of Ramlee Awang Murshid's novels, can be attributed to the popularity of the author himself who has become a household name in modern Malaysian literature. Therefore, this situation has proven that the commercial value is an important aspect in the production of film adaptations.

The third point is meeting the demands of the audience or today's generation. In this context, the current generation witnesses a phase of transition from using conventional medium to consuming the new media or multimedia in almost all walks of life. One of them is the film industry. Today's generation has the tendency to 'enjoy' many sorts of entertainment through multimedia, resulting in the perpetuation of a hedonistic culture. Thus, it has become more challenging to filmmakers and creative writers to work together to ensure that a film, one of today's sources of entertainment, should not be produced for a sheer enjoyment, especially for the youth. The local film industry has a big responsibility to provide entertainment 'responsibly' by instilling good values so as to provide indirect education and morality. Subsequently, morally-conscious films may exude positivity in life thus boosting up the morale of the youth. The film, *Pulang*, directed by Kabir Bhatia, is a case in point where it emphasises on the educational aspect of life thus providing a guidance to the audience especially among the younger generation. It can be summed up that the demands of the generation should be considered in the production of film adaptations especially with regard to educating the younger generation.

## **The Importance of Film Adaptation**

Based on the previous discussion, a film adaptation is a medium that may help the mass to have an effective understanding of literary works. The advancement in the world of information technology has shifted the transition of medium from the conventional use of printed materials to a medium which is technology-savvy. This technology-driven medium which is also known as multimedia has open up more and wider windows of opportunity in producing creative works. With the production of film adaptations, a work of literature has literally leapt off the page at the audience. As if given a 'life', the literary work is further enjoyed in its filmic form because of audio-visual effects. Such cinematic experience may enhance the understanding of literature. The audience does not necessarily read the text, but rather by enjoying film adaptations, they gain insight into the world of literature. However, in producing film adaptations, the filmmakers should adhere to the three basics mentioned previously. It is to be further emphasised that there should be a good cooperation between the filmmaker and the writer in order to produce a well-balanced film adaptation. Thus, a film adaptation is an effective medium to help audience better understand a literary work.

The emergence of the adaptation concept in literature is pivotal in ensuring the sustainability of the field of literature itself. Adapting literary works into films have brought significant impacts to literature. This is due to the fact that a film adaptation of literature, can indirectly increase the number of people who may be interested in literary works. Literature is not a popular subject among Malaysians, perhaps due to its basic nature that it requires reading. It has been proven through various researches that Malaysians do not read enough books. According to a statement by the director of the national library of Malaysia, the Malaysian literacy rate is below 55 percent with an average of a Malaysian only reads between 15 and 20 books per year (Bernama, 2017) [13]. Due to the low literacy rate in the country, the demands for printed materials are also correlatively low. The national library of Malaysia has produced a statistics on the number of books registered according to their categories from 2006 to 2018 as shown below:

**TABLE 3.** Statistics of Books Registered in Malaysia 2006 – 2018 from The National Library of Malaysia.

Subject	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Cumulative (Unit)	Cumulative (%)
General Title	1,672	171	207	165	133	214	176	174	100	154	227	230	245	3,868	1.77%
Philosophy / Psychology	154	142	252	214	223	206	362	353	247	210	258	213	208	3,042	1.39%
Religion	589	1,063	1,269	1,409	1,325	1,786	1,913	1,716	1,622	1,301	2,298	1,326	1,693	19,310	8.82%
Sociology, Statistics	53	276	315	246	184	223	270	286	383	223	319	243	274	3,297	1.51%
Political Science	153	256	194	155	139	132	99	141	124	112	131	132	175	1,943	0.89%
Economy	-	-	334	338	250	390	380	371	375	373	497	504	549	4,361	1.99%
Law, Public Administration, Welfare Science	183	207	435	536	343	571	434	473	374	382	578	541	527	5,584	2.55%
Military	4	27	73	15	20	34	47	48	76	49	97	81	68	639	0.29%
Education	2,368	303	459	599	611	1,020	1,316	1,416	1,266	999	1,252	1,274	1,420	14,303	6.53%
Commerce, Communication, Transport	114	130	97	202	81	151	188	77	60	81	97	68	79	1,425	0.65%
Traditional, Custom and Folk Literature	134	66	509	503	403	233	434	437	231	233	228	144	185	3,740	1.71%
Languages	4,010	3,138	3,747	3,853	3,308	3,601	3,657	5,031	4,106	3,121	3,644	3,749	3,932	48,895	22.32%
Mathematics	826	424	857	842	1,075	1,171	1,289	1,361	1,074	880	1,436	1,461	1,761	14,457	6.60%
Natural Sciences	576	681	854	675	899	985	1,051	1,025	1,059	752	603	713	889	10,762	4.91%
Medical Sciences, General Health Science	152	147	444	263	246	426	612	404	476	362	475	437	490	4,934	2.25%
Technology, Engineering, Industry	1,125	87	294	205	558	540	307	173	267	343	365	305	277	4,846	2.21%
Agriculture, Stockbreeding Forestry, Hunting, Fishery	65	47	264	196	136	172	136	122	126	206	207	145	146	1,968	0.90%
Home Sciences	77	76	131	213	226	203	317	352	184	230	334	210	193	2,746	1.25%
Managing Administration and Organisation	135	349	680	446	558	1,195	699	472	422	468	509	460	520	6,913	3.16%
Physical Planning, Town and Country Planning, Agriculture	466	51	85	154	129	249	147	294	165	185	168	157	130	2,380	1.09%
Plastic and Graphic Art, Photography	75	131	351	532	358	551	771	590	583	755	1,004	897	1,070	7,668	3.50%
Music, Performing Art, Film-viewing	55	48	52	84	103	60	93	210	91	67	224	400	374	1,861	0.85%
General and Special	77	57	52	166	86	349	184	197	182	114	174	123	163	1,519	0.69%
Literature	850	2,462	2,934	2,788	3,654	2,769	3,196	3,239	3,371	2,720	3,116	2,517	2,491	36,107	16.49%
Geography	424	378	616	555	407	507	579	578	603	587	703	478	366	6,779	3.10%
History, Biography	226	306	508	439	323	394	516	487	451	449	560	401	476	5,536	2.53%
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,563</b>	<b>11,023</b>	<b>16,044</b>	<b>15,767</b>	<b>15,756</b>	<b>17,923</b>	<b>19,171</b>	<b>19,987</b>	<b>17,969</b>	<b>15,354</b>	<b>19,592</b>	<b>17,213</b>	<b>18,663</b>	<b>219,025</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Based on the data in Table 3, there are 36,107 books on literature, which is amounting to only 16.49% of the total number of books registered from 2006 to 2018. Such finding is in line with the discussion of this research that there is a waning interest among the Malaysians in relation to the low production of printed books, especially on literature. Therefore, as suggested in this study, adapting texts to films can be seen as an important factor to ensure the sustainability of literature. The adaptation process may attract more people in taking up interest in literature especially among those who are not interested in reading. The film adaptations of literary works may further draw attention to wider audience or even readership thus contributing to increase the literacy rate in Malaysia.

## CONCLUSION

Based on several aspects discussed in this research, it can be concluded that the production of film adaptations is one of the most effective ways in making people to understand literature. A literary text should not be treated in isolation without any collaboration with other fields of knowledge or disciplines. On the contrary, the field of literature should be given more spaces so that it may further develop and innovate its methods of transmission. The important aspect that needs to be maintained is to ensure the literary element is still upheld and it becomes the central part in the production using any new medium. In successfully achieving the adaptation process, both parties – the creative writers and the filmmakers should work together and communicate effectively so as to produce film adaptations that have impacts on both the readers of literature and the moviegoers. This is because the readers or audience are the ones that receive the outcomes of film adaptation thus it is only fair that their demands are to be prioritised. Good film adaptations will also further provide appreciation and comprehension of the narrative aspect of literary works. With positive feedback and acceptance by the audience, their appreciation of literature can be further accentuated through the audio-visual effects when watching a film. This situation can also be viewed as a way of encouraging the society to embrace the current ‘explosion’ of the 4.0 industrial revolution in which the film industry is one of the most important technologies in this industrial revolution.

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