Visual narratives in digital books : adapting the Chinese novel Journey to the West for culturally diverse audiences

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Visual Narratives in Digital Books:
**Adapting the Chinese Novel *Journey to the West* for
Culturally Diverse Audiences**

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A thesis submitted to the Nanyang Technological University in partial
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September, 2019

Statement of Originality

I certify that all work submitted for this thesis is my original work. I declare that no other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement. Except where it is clearly stated that I have used some of this material elsewhere, this work has not been presented by me for assessment in any other institution or University. I certify that the data collected for this project are authentic and the investigations were conducted in accordance with the ethics policies and integrity standards of Nanyang Technological University and that the research data are presented honestly and without prejudice.

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Authorship Attribution Statement

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- I prepared the manuscript drafts.
- Professor Hans-Martin Rall assisted in reviewing the manuscript.
- The conference's scientific committee assisted in giving feedback and reviewing the manuscript.

20/09/2019

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Summary

Scholarship in narrative studies has tended to explore the relationship between the recent development in digital storytelling and the audience's reception. Despite initial scepticism, digital books have rapidly gained popularity, largely due to their convenience and vast technical support of portable reading devices. By maximizing the unique storytelling capability of digital books, many independent enterprises have harnessed this new narrative form to engage their readers through interactivity.

However, the way in which storytellers and their audiences interact through digital books is not yet fully understood. This scholarship has been comparatively sparse and has left gaps in our knowledge about the relationship among storytellers, the medium of digital books and the target audiences. Culturally specific narratives in digital form have garnered little attention and demand further studies, especially in the context of globalisation.

This thesis seeks to expound upon our understanding of digital books' potential to relate local stories to culturally diverse audiences. It suggests an interactive approach to storytelling and applies its findings to retell one of the world's most famous stories, the Chinese novel *Journey to the West*. The story's variety of adaptations offer a great resource to examine the relationship between storytellers and their audiences as well as the cultural challenge of storytelling. Within the intellectual framework of adaptation study, convergence of media and visual narratives, this thesis employs a comparative approach to examine selected case-studies of *JTW*. Making extensive use of visual analysis, the research explores these most essential research questions:

- How can the story of *JTW* be brought to a global audience while honouring its cultural background and origin through the use of illustrated e-books?
- How can the negotiation between global appeal and local traditions help define parameters for visual adaptations?

In the practical application of the research, this thesis examines the interplay between digital books and the readership's engagement to retell the story of *JTW* to the digital audience. It does so by adapting the story as an illustrated e-book with limited animation and interactive elements. The medium of digital books lends itself to the hybridity of animation studies, illustration studies and visual narratives.

Through theoretical research and practical work, this study explores various narrative strategies and how they can be implemented using digital illustration in an interactive book format. It contributes to our knowledge of visual narratives in the digital context by exposing the current state of the art of digital media and how these can be utilised to engage with the readership.

This research also makes visible the ways in which visual narratives in digital media can answer the challenge of telling local stories, and thereby provides a means to facilitate negotiation between cultural elements in local stories and their culturally diverse audiences.

Its conclusions call for further research into the future of visual narratives that scholars and storytellers can draw upon, and into the possibility of employing digital media to transcend cultural boundaries in storytelling.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Research Aims and Background

This study aims to contribute to the fields of digital narratives and adaptation studies through a theoretical framework and through the submission of a practical work (a visual adaptation of the Chinese novel *Journey to the West* as a digital illustrated book with interactive elements and limited animation). The research begins by examining the context of visual adaptations of classic Asian literature against today's background of digital globalisation. Next, it explores the capacities of digital illustrated book production. The research proposes that digital illustrated books can serve as a transcultural medium to negotiate the local traditions in classic Asian literature with the universal appeal that transcends cultural barriers.

Putting the challenge of defending local cultures in the context of globalisation, I reference the conceptualisation of Ronald Niezen's book *A World Beyond Difference: Cultural Identity in the Age of Globalization* (2004). Niezen outlines the two most common conceptualisations of globalisation: 'One that approaches it as a process of almost irrevocable cultural convergence and the other as a process and set of institutions that underpin a minimally regulated system of global capitalism'.¹ Throughout my research, I refer to globalisation in the cultural convergence context. However, since the

¹ Niezen, *A World Beyond Difference*, 56.

discussion also includes the characteristics of publishing markets, I nevertheless relate to globalisation in the economic context where there is a need to cross-reference these two. In the book, Niezen also relates the importance of digital technologies in the globalisation context. He remarks, ‘The internet has become for many the leading source of borderless thinking, a medium in which ideas, sounds, and images can be made instantly available to a global audience, a communicative space in which there are few frontiers and little interference by the legal apparatuses of states’.² With digital platforms, a few indigenous societies have made even broader use of the possibilities of the internet to transcend the gaps of the nation-states and international forums. To many extents, digital media is transcending the world’s cultural barriers.

In the same way, digital books have been reducing the cultural gaps between communities. Therefore, books, including adaptations of classic texts now become cross-cultural. Does that process dilute local identities? On the other hand, the medium of illustrated e-books enriches our visual storytelling language, but it also presents another challenge: Can the widened capacity of this medium help to transcend the cultural barriers in digital readership?

Developments in digital technology over the past few decades have brought significant changes to the way we read and tell stories, which led to a profound change in our understanding of the new media. The emergence of a new medium does not erase the old, but it challenges the limitations of the old. This is true for all media; it is also true for books and for the relationship between storytellers and readers. Digital

² Niezen, 56.

technologies have brought new forms of books and storytelling experiences. This does not mean an eradication of the old concept, but it suggests that we expand our understanding of storytelling. Referring to the emergence of new media in storytelling, Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin, in their book *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, reflect:

In this last decade of the twentieth century, we are in an unusual position to appreciate remediation, because of the rapid development of new digital media and the nearly as rapid response by traditional media. Older electronic and print media are seeking to reaffirm their status within our culture as digital media challenge that status.³

The shift in the understanding of the new book medium has also challenged the conventional publishing industry. Joseph Dominick predicts in his 2010 book *The Dynamics of Mass Communication – Media in the Digital Age* that the digital revolution will continue to have an impact on the book industry. One of the most prominent topics around the turn of the century was the e-book, a development that has the potential to reshape the publishing industry.⁴ The e-book and e-publishing industry has paved the way for rapid expansion of books' content and storytelling potential. Digital publishing has provided huge opportunities for storytellers, including self-published authors, to produce contents without going through the lengthy process of conventional publishing and distribution. In such a context, 'publishers and book sellers noted with concern that the e-book made it possible for authors to sell and distribute their works directly to consumers, thus bypassing the publisher and retail outlet altogether'.⁵ On the one hand,

³ Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 5.

⁴ Dominick, *Dynamics of Mass Communication*, Tata McGraw-Hill Education.

⁵ Ibid, 19.

this freedom challenges the quality control of book contents. On the other, it shifts the role of the storytellers to a more active part of the publishing chain. Now, they are not only more in control of the content, but also the publishing platform, which is often decided by the publishers. In their paper published in 2016, 'From Publishers to Self-Publishing: The Disruptive Effects of Digitalisation on the Book Industry', Morten Hviid, Sofia Izquierdo Sanchez and Sabine Jacques notice that

Prior to digitalisation, it would have been prohibitively expensive for most authors to bypass publishers through self-publishing. However, this has changed with the arrival of the e-book and, in particular, e-book readers. Although traditional publishers still have a comparative advantage in terms of better data and funds to pay advances, self-publishing e-books has benefits in terms of speed as well as offering the author greater freedom and control over the final product and, possibly, even the pricing of their book.⁶

To readers, the shift in digital publishing also brings more freedom. Digital publishing provides them variety, not just of content, but also of the reading experience. Also, measuring and defining the digital readership is not easy. This group of culturally diverse audience consists of people of all ages and ethnic origins around the world. The internet is now becoming more and more accessible to all, making digital books accessible to this rapidly growing and audience that we call 'digital citizens'. French sociologist Gisèle Sapiro noticed that in the book industry, 'globalisation fostered the unification of a global market' (2010).⁷ However, in the globalisation context, 'defining the borders is at stake in the competition and the struggles occurring among these spaces and within them'. The traditional (pre-digital) concepts of the book industry were

⁶ Hviid, Sanchez and Jacques, 'From Publishers to Self-Publishing', 4.

⁷ Sapiro, *Globalization and Cultural Diversity in the Book Market*, 421.

shaped around a particular group of readers of clearly defined age group, ethnicity, income, lifestyle or education. The internet blurs all the above boundaries, and the old definition of 'book market' is challenged. Tanure Ojaide noted in 2015 how publishing has gone beyond paper or hard copies to include online publishing.

The appearance online of literary works not only makes them accessible but also promotes them... In addition to online publishing, many writers publish their works on Facebook and personal blogs...The Internet has succeeded to dematerialize publications by not having a hard copy of books but an online copy. And it has extended the possibilities of a literary work's audience because it no longer matters where a work is published. Barring the shenanigans of despotic or conservative governments, a literary work online can be accessed and read anywhere in the world.⁸

On one hand, it is certainly the case that the digital-globalisation of the artefacts (books, e-books, digital publishing, interactive media) has meant that the market has 'expanded' and become easier to access, and this is not to deny that some "cross-cultural" phenomena have happened as a consequence. But there is a potential negative flip-side to these changes. Can cultural preservation and presentation, in other words, indigeneity in storytelling get diluted in the cross-cultural storytelling? In particular, how might the local authors/storytellers satisfy their diverse readership of the Internet with a global appeal, at the same time present their local traditions?

Helff and Woletz (2009) reflect on this cross-cultural aspects of digital storytelling and how globalisation is reflected in the narratives. Therefore, the stories present the author's backgrounds as well as their cultural experiences and social influences.⁹

⁸ Ojaide, Indigeneity, globalization, and African literature: Personally speaking, 204.

⁹ Helff and Woletz. 'Narrating Euro-African Life in Digital Space.' 129-143.

In the relationship between authors and readers, changes in the publishing industry also challenge the opposed tendencies embraced in conventional publishing. This is because digital technologies have expanded the capacity of storytelling as well as readers' behaviour. In relation to the rapid expansion in readership brought by digital publishing, Gregory Crane in his article 'Historical Perspectives on the Book and Information Technology' points out that

The potential audience on the Internet is at least 10,000,000 machines, four orders of magnitude larger—since the average sales of academic publications is certainly not rising and the number of people with access to the World Wide Web is certainly not shrinking, this ratio is going to increase during the foreseeable future.¹⁰

While mentioning the cultural diversity, Crane also discusses a significant aspect of digital publishing in retelling classic literature brings us to the negotiation between local traditions in retelling the classics and to digital readers. He draws our attention particularly to the digital readership's cultural diversity, stating that with the quantitative increases in our audience diversity, 'we must decide on what our audience will be and what kind of experience we hope to foster'. Through this new medium, according to Crane, we can create networks of knowledge so that 'the curious may pursue their interests as far as their will and ability take them, rather than as far as traditional print publication has allowed'.¹¹

Certainly, Crane's research also touches on the significance of retelling locally rooted classics to a global readership. Salter's book addresses the impacts of digital storytelling. However, these authors have not yet highlighted extensively the importance

¹⁰ Crane, 'Historical Perspectives', 135.

of cultural representation in digital adaptations. Many scholarly investigations have noted the potential of digital storytelling to provide variety to diverse audiences. John Hartley and Kelly McWilliam remark in *Story Circle: Digital Storytelling Around the World* (2009) that ‘digital storytelling is now practiced around the world in increasingly diverse contexts, from cultural institutions and community development programs to screen innovation and commercial applications. It represents something of a social movement. It also occupies a unique place in consumer-generated media’.¹¹ They also note that digital storytelling represents one of the first ‘genuine amalgamations of expert and consumer/user-led creativity’.¹² As a result, it generates ‘an elaborated textual system created for the new media ecology, digital storytelling challenges the traditional distinction between professional and amateur production, reworking the producer/consumer relationship. It is a contribution to (and test of) contemporary thinking about “digital literacy” and participation, storytelling formats, and content distribution’.¹³ How can cultural identities be situated in such a context? How can digital publishing highlight and not erase the ‘local’ in the context of globalisation? How does cultural diversity relate to both digital publishing and adaptations of the classics?

Speaking of adaptations, many scholars have discussed what defines an adaptation. One of the most prominent scholars in the field, Linda Hutcheon, states in *A Theory of Adaptation* (2012) that adaptations emerge from the process in which

adapters relate stories in their different ways. They use the same tools that storytellers have always used: they actualize or concretize ideas; they make

¹¹ Hartley and McWilliam, *Story Circle*, 4.

¹² Ibid, 5.

simplifying selections, but also amplify and extrapolate; they make analogies; they critique or show their respect, and so on. But the stories they relate are taken from elsewhere, not invented anew. Like parodies, adaptations have an overt and defining relationship to prior texts, usually revealingly called ‘sources.’ Unlike parodies, however, adaptations usually openly announce this relationship.¹³

In addition, when discussing the dialogue between a source text and its adaptation, Robert Stam claims that ‘literature will always have axiomatic superiority over any adaptation of it because of its seniority as an art form’ (2000). Much criticism of adaptations relates to the question of ‘fidelity’, or loyalty to the source text. Stam suggests that the biased hierarchy of the source text and adaptations involves what he calls ‘iconophobia (suspicion of the visual) and logophilia (love of the word as sacred) (2008).¹⁴ However, Hutcheon argues that ‘a negative view of adaptation might simply be the product of thwarted expectations on the part of a fan desiring fidelity to a beloved adapted text or on the part of someone teaching literature and therefore needing proximity to the text and perhaps some entertainment value to do so’.¹⁵ Here, I argue that in the case of my adaptation, the process can engage a selection of narrative elements from the source text, visualisation and, most importantly, cultural references. This, however, is not by any means a process of cultural appropriation (which will be explained in detail later), but a dialogue with the source text as well as its traditions. In particular, I choose story elements from the original text of the Chinese novel *Journey to the West* to create a hybrid book form that combines illustration, comics, animation

¹³ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 3.

¹⁴ Stam, ‘Beyond Fidelity’, in *Film Adaptation*, 54–76.

¹⁵ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 4.

and digital media. This process involves not only the dialogue with the source text, but also Chinese cultural references and the tradition of the story's past adaptations.

My understanding of adaptation is largely built upon Linda Hutcheon's definition of adaptation as 'a process of creation that involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation'.¹⁶ Hutcheon defends the adaptations' maligned artistic value, insisting that 'to be second is not to be secondary or inferior; likewise, to be first is not to be originary or authoritative'.¹⁷ Instead, the process of adaptation frequently moves a story across different modes, opening up new possibilities for both the storyteller(s) and the audiences. In particular, Hutcheon notes three modes of narrative: telling (as in novels), which immerse us 'through imagination in a fictional world'; showing (as in plays and films), which immerse us 'through the perception of the aural and the visual'; and participatory (as in videogames), which immerse us 'physically and kinaesthetically'.¹⁸ For example, a visual adaptation of *JTW* is not merely a retelling with added visuals. The known story is incarnated in a different form, reflecting the storyteller's imagination, aesthetic and ideals. These introduce the audience to a totally new narrative experience of the story. Therefore, my core understanding of an adaptation is not merely an attempt to rehash or to copy; it moves the story, its world and its audience into a different narrative mode, wherein the audience can step into the story world. 'Adaptation involves repetition, but it must present novelty.'¹⁹ An

¹⁶ Ibid, 8.

¹⁷ Ibid, xiii.

¹⁸ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 22.

¹⁹ Ibid.

adaptation creates a bridge to a known story world, but also ‘surprises’ the audience by expanding that world and the audience’s relationship to that world and that adapted text. That understanding demands that we view adaptations as ‘aesthetic objects in their own right’.²⁰ Therefore, my theoretical discussion of visual adaptations of the classic Chinese novel *JTW* is built upon the above understanding of adaptation. Through investigation of adaptation studies in a variety of visual media, my research raises the possibility that illustrated e-books can serve as a medium that transcends cultural boundaries in today’s context of convergence media and globalisation. In addition, this research also explores the relationship between storytellers and their readership in digital visual narratives. Based on both theoretical findings and practical experiments, my research suggests practical approaches to translating local stories for culturally diverse audiences. Such theoretical findings and practical approaches aim to provide new understanding to academic discussion as well as to the practice of digital visual storytelling.

As mentioned earlier, most digital products nowadays are no longer bound to any territory but are distributed across the internet. Therefore, adaptations of classic texts are no longer bound to any particular country or market. Does that process obscure local identities and cultural heritage in the classics?

Investigation of this question requires us to examine the larger context of cultural homogenisation and indigenisation in digital media, which has been discussed widely in academic debates. Jinghua Guo insists that in today’s globalisation context, cultural identity is ‘unavoidably a very sharp question, and that multiple layers of meanings are

²⁰ Ibid, 6.

involved in cultural identity’²¹ and suggests cross-cultural interpretation as a way to help ‘the national to become international’. Discussing cultural diversity, Gisèle Sapiro highlights a demand that globalisation brings to the book market. She notices that ‘the dynamics of globalisation stimulated local cultural industries’.²² As a result, cultural exchange increased. But does globalisation induce more heterogeneity or more homogeneity? According to Sapiro, globalisation implies ‘a reduction of the number of interconnections between languages, thus less heterogeneity’. However, when we pay closer attention to the structure of the book market, it appears that this process is not homogeneous, but promotes the contrary.

It seems the global market, or the new globalisation context of digital publishing, demands that its participants negotiate the ‘local’ identities in the media content and the ‘global’ scale of the market. Michal Borodo, in *Adaptations in the Age of Globalisation*, explores this negotiation through a concept which he calls ‘glocal’.²³ In the discussion of cross-cultural adaptations of the classics, he suggests that there are indeed glocal adaptations that both achieve cultural homogenisation and are partly indigenized in adaptations. According to Borodo, these works have become ‘glocal texts, where the global and the local overlap’. Little research has been done to elaborate on how digital media, or digital books in particular, can be employed in the creative practice of these global adaptations.

²¹ Guo, ‘Cross-Cultural Inter-Semiotic Adaptation’, 9–17.

²² Sapiro, 423.

²³ Borodo, *Adaptations in the Age of Globalization*, 177–93.

But is the digital book a totally new medium brought to us by the digital revolution? In their book I mentioned earlier, Bolter and Grusin argue that

No medium today, and certainly no single media event, seems to do its cultural work in isolation from other media, any more than it works in isolation from other social and economic forces. What is new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media.²⁴

According to their insight, digital books and other new media that have come onto the scene ‘are not external agents that come to disrupt an unsuspecting culture. They emerge from within cultural contexts, and they refashion other media, which are embedded in the same or similar contexts’. Thus, my research suggests that understanding digital books requires investigating their connections to the media that preceded them, such as traditional printed books, animation, interactive media and even films.

The medium presents itself as a suitable platform to bring back the classics as digital adaptations for cross-cultural readership. But in going digital and global, new adaptations of the classics need to answer not only to the cultural diversity of the audience, but also to their expectations of the medium, including interactivity, game-like experience, extensions to further resources and even online communities built around the story-worlds. The question is, How does the construction of these narrative aspects answer to both the cultural identities of the classics and the diversity of the audience?

To answer that question, my study re-examines and recognises the relationship between adaptations and illustrated e-books. My practical aim is to explore the

²⁴ Bolter and Grusin, 15.

capability of the medium to integrate local traditions into visual adaptations of Asian classics and to transpose them for digital media, addressing a culturally diverse readership.

Such practical challenge calls for the discussion of transcultural adaptation. Transcultural adaptation not only involves apparent changes such as language, context, time and place, but also consists of political issues and questions regarding cultural preservation and representation. Transcultural adaptations demonstrate the basic ideology of the cultures from which they originate as well as the novelty of their new adaptation contexts. When a story travels from one country to another, it needs to mutate to serve a new audience. Understanding the adapted context and the audience is crucial in the process of adaptation.

Also, the context of digital storytelling with a vastly diverse readership raises the question: which narrative form is most suitable to retell a classic local story with its cultural representation while offering a universal appeal to which readers from other cultures can relate? This leads me to the effective use of visual narratives as a tool to negotiate cultural differences in storytelling. Visual narratives such as comics, live action films, picture books and animation can be much more accessible across cultures because their storytelling relies primarily on the visuals. Therefore, the practical question I investigated to choose the medium of my adaptation is, Which visual narrative medium is suitable for negotiating cultural differences in the readership? That brings me to the medium of illustrated e-books, a hybrid literature form of picture books, comics, animation and digital games.

1.2 Research questions

In summary, the structure of this research was determined by the following questions:

- How can the story of *JTW* be brought to a global audience while honouring its cultural background and origin through the use of illustrated e-books?
- How can the negotiation between global appeal and local traditions help define parameters for visual adaptations?

These questions emerged from the aim to investigate the connection between convergent media with the current challenges of visualization and fidelity in adaptation studies. My discussion explores how these two fields may be interrelated, specifically how questions raised by adaptation studies can perhaps be answered by new findings and approaches in convergence media (with the medium of illustrated e-books as an example) and vice versa.

1.3 Methodology

This section elaborates on the methodology used and how it presents the dialogue between my contextual and theoretical positioning leading to the art practice, the making of a new adaptation.

Discussing the requirements of research, Edmonds and Candy state that these processes need to be made clear to those without the tacit understanding of them in order to create shareable research outcomes.²⁵ In relation to the integration of research and

²⁵ Edmonds and Candy, 'Relating Theory, Practice and Evaluation', 470–76.

practice in visual art, Graeme Sullivan, in his book *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in Visual Arts*, proposes that ‘the possibility of gaining new understanding involves investigating issues that have personal and public relevance. Research of this kind is imaginative, systematic, and inclusive and includes drawing on all kinds of knowledge, experience, and reasoning’.²⁶ He insists that ‘if a goal of any inquiry is to be able to act on the knowledge gained, then it is reasonable to expect that understanding is as significant as explanation as an outcome of research’. Kristina Niedderer and Seymour Roworth-Stokes suggest that ‘research through practice can offer experiential, tacit knowledge that conventional research neglects, as the latter is blinkered by its focus on propositional knowledge and the fact that it is limited by language.’²⁷

Another scholar, Linda Candy, defines practice-led Research PhD as ‘concerned with the nature of practice and leads to new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice. The main focus of the research is to advance knowledge about practice, or to advance knowledge within practice. In a doctoral thesis, the results of practice-led research may be fully described in text form without the inclusion of a creative outcome.’²⁸

Nimkulrat (2007) defines practice-led research is ‘the conscious exploration with the knowledge involved in the making of artifacts.’²⁹ In this practice-led research,

²⁶ Sullivan, *Art Practice as Research*, Sage, 97.

²⁷ Niedderer and Roworth-Stokes, ‘The Role and Use of Creative Practice’, In *IASDR International Conference*.

²⁸ Candy, ‘Practice based research: A guide,’ 1-19.

²⁹ Nimkulrat, *The role of documentation in practice-led research*, 2.

I am aware of my equally important roles as a practitioner as well as a researcher as research becomes an intertwined part of practice.

From the above points of view that practice and theory can support each other in the research, a primary goal of my practice-led study is to generate new understanding that can be applied in the investigated research areas, including adaptation studies, Asian storytelling, digital storytelling and illustration. This methodology aims to establish an intrinsic link between practice and theory for the development of new ideas as well as the evaluation of practical work.

To support the dialogue between theory and practice, I engage with multiple case studies. According to Yin (2003) a case study design should be considered when:

- The focus of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions.
- The behaviour of those involved in the study cannot be manipulated.
- Contextual conditions need to be examined.
- The boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clear.

Following this approach, Yin suggests that using a multiple case study to explore differences within and between cases in order to replicate findings across cases. Therefore, it is crucial that the cases are chosen carefully to predict results based on a theory.³⁰

Thus, contextual review, which consists of the literature review, case studies analysis and reflection on my professional practice as a digital illustrator, is used in the practical work development. In return, the making of practice, including documentation,

³⁰ Yin, *Case study research: Design and methods*, 24.

review and resources, is used to demonstrate and examine the existing knowledge. This cyclic strategy of theory and practice forms the basic framework of the research. A practice was produced during the research process. Based on the research questions and the hypothesis of the thesis, my practice is developed through the creation of a digital illustrated book of *Journey to the West*. The theoretical discussion is informed by answering the research questions, which are reflected during the documentation and critical review of the practice.

My study also questions the interrelated aspects of adaptation studies, visual narratives and convergence of media. It seeks to examine how these aspects can be addressed in the transcultural adaptation of *JTW* (practical component). Since the chosen adaptation medium is a hybrid form of different visual media, the research involves an investigation of case studies taken from animation, live action film, illustration, comics and interactive games.

With this narrative strategy, my new adaptation works with the first seven chapters in one of the most well-known abridged English translations of *JTW* by Anthony Yu. Using the first seven chapters of *JTW* (focusing on the character Monkey King), my adaptation selects story elements that support the reader's emotional engagement. To this end, the narrative content drives the visual development, and the visuals serve the narrative requirements. In both stages, the adaptation investigates the effectiveness of illustrated e-books to promote reader engagement by adopting existing approaches to digital storytelling and testing their impact within the research framework. Some of the features applied in the adaptation include character personalisation and interactivity. Most importantly, the interactivity should be used to

strengthen the storytelling. Bringing this back to the larger context of the research, my adaptation explores the universal language of myth and the capacity of illustrated e-books to enable digital readers to express their diversity in the storytelling.

Thus, my practical strategies reflect the findings of the theoretical discussion in a feedback loop. In this way, practice is informed by research and also tested by findings in research. In this feedback loop, theoretical investigation can be used to explore the capacity of illustrated e-books in practice. Besides, the intrinsic integration of theory and practice provides findings for both theorists as well as image-makers.

The key research contexts I investigate are visual narratives in digital media, adaptation studies and digital storytelling. The Chinese national epic *Journey to the West* is situated at the centre of these areas as an example of a local story that can be adapted for a culturally diverse audience. With theory and practice intrinsically linked, my research framework was informed by my artistic practice as well as my theoretical findings. In addition, although the research is conducted in Singapore, focusing on Asian storytelling traditions, the research environment is indeed multicultural, with a strong focus on interdisciplinary practice. In such a context, I hope my background as an Asian artist with education and practice in both cultures can provide a multicultural aspect to the scholarship.

The process of making my own visual adaptation is also coupled with a study inspired by my practical fieldwork in digital illustration and publishing. In this feedback loop, theoretical findings and practice are always intrinsically linked, with one prompting the other.

Figure 1: Diagram showing the feedback loops in two stages of my research.

In summary, the feedback loop begins with examining the existing materials for context of the relationship between visual adaptation and digital storytelling, specifically illustrated e-books. Then, the discussion explores how local traditions' representation and universality has been reflected through visual adaptations of *Journey to the West* over the past five decades. From the visual analysis of these case studies that relate to the main research questions, insight is gathered to inform the practice in the later stage. The process is described in detail below.

Prior Stage – Context Review and Theoretical Discussion

In the prior stage, I sifted through my research interests and came up with initial observations. From these designated research areas, I reviewed articles, papers and adaptations that related to my research questions. In particular, I looked into the discussion of cultural representation in transcultural adaptations. Meanwhile, I also related these articles to the context of today's state of digital storytelling and

globalisation, in which a considerable shift has taken place in audience diversity and demand. In this stage, I also examined my field practice as an illustrator. The study in this stage formed my implication that illustrated e-books can serve as a transcultural medium in visual adaptations and can be examined through the creation of a new visual adaptation of *Journey to the West*.

From this starting point, I defined a scope for the theoretical discussion, which was built upon two pillars. First, as described earlier, this practice was derived from the idea of making a new adaptation that demonstrates illustrated e-books' potential as an art form that can be employed by visual storytellers to negotiate their cultural heritage for a diverse audience. The second pillar is *JTW* and its visual adaptations, with the hypothesis that the story demonstrates both universalities as well as representations of Chinese culture. Its academic significance and relevance to the question of cultural preservation in the globalisation context are discussed through the context review and visual analysis of the case studies, visual adaptations of the story from the 1940s to recent years. Together, these two pillars informed the basis of my practical work in the later stage.

Later Stage – A Practice-Led Research

Along with the making of the adaptation, the initial arguments were tested and modified, and the feedback loop constantly strengthened both theory and practice.

A script for the new adaptation of *JTW* as an illustrated e-book, *The Song of Stone Monkey*, was then developed to test ways of integrating theoretical findings into practice. The first practice plan was carried out afterwards with story development. This

plan helped me identify the issues and challenges for my adaptation, where the integration of linear and nonlinear narratives became the centre of my technical exploration.

Apart from aiming to fluently integrate linear and nonlinear narratives equipped with interactivity and limited animation, in this stage I also experimented with stylistic variations, combining my own artistic repertoire with the capacity of digital illustration. In addition, through the integration of interactivity into the reading experience, the adaptation's narrative structure was tested and revised. The final script was then developed according to the concept that the story should present a universality that is typically reflected in a classic hero story, yet introduce character complexity that can be personalised based on the readership's participation. This double-sided objective is also carried out by presenting Chinese local traditions on the one hand and reflecting the universality of the story on another.

Hannula, Suoranta, & Vadén (2005) define artistic research is about 'the self-reflective and self-critical processes of a person taking part in the production of meaning within contemporary art, and in such a fashion that it communicates where it is coming from, where it stands at this precise moment, and where it wants to go.'³¹ Indeed in the later stage of my research, summarising the theoretical findings and their applications in the practice requires a self-reflective process, which Nimkulrat describes as: 'After the creative process ends and the artifacts eventually get displayed in an exhibition, the practitioner-researcher plays the researcher's role and looks back at the preceding

³¹ Hannula, Suoranta, and Vadén, *Artistic research: Theories, methods and practices*, 10.

artistic process. The practitioner-researcher analyzes and contextualizes the resulting artifacts as well as the creative process that went into it using the documentation created during the process and any relevant theories. While playing the researcher's role, the practitioner-researcher may use reflections on the artifacts and elements from the artistic production process to facilitate the inquiry she is interested in. Then, the practitioner's role takes over again. The process will continue and the two roles will be played alternately, until the process yields somewhat stable answers to the research questions being pursued.³²

All the above aspects are discussed in greater detail in Chapters 3 and 4. The evaluation and self-reflection in the adaptation provide an inquiry into the relationship between storytellers and readers. This relationship informs predictions about the future of the genre and possible further research, which are the subject of Chapter 5.

1.4 Thesis Overview

As a result of the topics discussed in the written thesis, the practical component of this study demonstrates the creation of an illustrated e-book adaptation of *Journey to the West*. This adaptation, titled *The Song of Stone Monkey*, adapts the first seven chapters of *JTW* to be read digitally on either computers or mobile reading devices. This practical component also includes a video demonstration of how the book incorporates interactivity into the reading experience. Aiming to experiment with illustrated e-books as an effective art form in the transcultural adaptation of local literature, the

³² ³² Nimkulrat, 4.

documentation of the making of my practical work is used in different ways in the text as described below.

Chapter 1 presents the basis of this study by describing the main aims of the research, main research questions, scope, focus and limitations. It also documents methods used in the research and the interrelationship between theory and practice.

Chapter 2 contextualises the current state of the art of narrative studies, adaptation studies and convergence media and discusses the shift in the audience's behaviour to locate the research in this context. Based on the premise that there is a demand for the transcultural approach in visual adaptations of Asian classics that require effective, low-cost production, the investigation suggests that illustrated e-books can be an effective art form. The chapter also presents *Journey to the West* as an example of classic Asian literature that competently blends universal themes and local traditions. The last part of this chapter introduces a number of case studies that present the negotiation of universality and local traditions through their visual adaptation of *JTW*.

Chapter 3 analyses the case studies in recognition of the importance of cultural representation expressed in visual adaptations. Through inspecting historical contexts, achievement and audience reception of each work, this chapter examines specific challenges of adapting *JTW* to a multicultural audience. The discussion begins with examples of traditional media such as animation, film and picture books, then goes on to explore recent attempts at hybrid digital works. By reflecting on the aesthetic achievements as well as the shortcomings of these examples, the discussion arrives at conclusions about how to accomplish the cultural presentation in transcultural

adaptations. These issues and findings provide the foundation for the practice-led research discussed in chapter 4.

Chapter 4 revisits the main narrative challenges presented in the previous chapter to suggest that, first, the new adaptation should incorporate linear and nonlinear narrative, and second, interactivity is an effective trope for incorporating the personal participation of the diverse readership into the story. Considering the interrelationship between narrative structure and stylistic exploration, this chapter examines how narrative challenge led to visual development. The first half of this chapter documents in detail how the adaptation was created using findings from the Prior Stage discussion. The results evaluate the effectiveness of digital tools in solving the narrative challenges of transcultural adaptation. The second part of this chapter documents a number of innovative aspects of the medium explored during the practical process, demonstrating how digital tools can be used to achieve a multidimensional reading experience.

Chapter 5 reflects on the research findings and contributes to the ongoing discussion of local vs global in transcultural adaptation. It provides insight about illustrated e-books as a visual art form for transcultural adaptation as well as a medium for cultural exchange. The conclusion also suggests further research and potential applications in the future of the genre.

1.5 Focus and Limitations

As mentioned previously, my research is grounded upon Linda Hutcheon's understanding of adaptation as 'an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works; a creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging; an extended

intertextual engagement with the adapted work'.³³ It also draws from the concept of transculturality that Wolfgang Welsch discusses in his paper *Transculturality – The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today*. Following his understanding of transculturality as a medium to balance 'global' and 'local', to negotiate 'universalistic and particularistic aspects of cultural hybridization',³⁴ my research explores how the concept of transculturality can be examined in digital narratives and how it can best be implemented in a careful visual adaptation of *JTW*. In my discussion, these two aspects of adaptation and transculturality are always related to the big research questions. The concept of transculturality links to the question of fidelity in adaptation studies and how it can be achieved through digital storytelling. Based on the analysis of the chosen case studies, my theoretical discussion concerns how best to adapt classic texts using cutting-edge techniques for contemporary audiences.

³³ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 8.

³⁴ Welsch, 'Transculturality', in *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, Sage, 194–213.

Figure 2: Research territory with covered and uncovered areas.

In choosing *JTW* as the subject to explore, I am aware of the existing body of scholarship related to the novel's cultural heritage. *JTW* has been discussed extensively in academic research. A few notable examples include Jing Wang's *The Story of Stone: Intertextuality, Ancient Chinese Stone Lore, and the Stone Symbolism in Dream of the Red Chamber, Water Margin, and The Journey to the West* (1992);³⁵ Cho Bantly's *Buddhist Allegory in the Journey to the West* (1989);³⁶ and Qiancheng Li's *Fictions of Enlightenment: Journey to the West, Tower of Myriad Mirrors, and Dream of the Red Chamber* (2004).³⁷ The pertinent areas of investigation include Chinese studies,

³⁵ Wang, *The Story of Stone*, Duke University Press.

³⁶ Bantly, 'Buddhist Allegory in the Journey to the West', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 3, 512–24.

³⁷ Li, *Fictions of Enlightenment*, University of Hawaii Press.

translation studies and discussions of Asian philosophy. However, considering that *JTW* was chosen for this research due to its ability to transcend cultures, I do not include the argument surrounding heritage within the scope of the research.

In addition, although *JTW* has been the subject of debate since the sixteenth century, my discussion does not cover the entire existence of the original work but is limited to selected adaptations of *JTW* from the 1940s to the present for the reasons listed earlier.

In dealing with transcultural adaptations and multicultural readership, the research suggests a need to examine audience studies and reception studies. However, the primary focus of the study is adaptation studies in relation to visual narrative. Therefore, reception studies is not considered a part of the research scope. In relation to the medium of digital books as a new narrative form, the discussion might lead to the question of the e-book as a commodity and its role in the publishing market. However, the economic aspects of digital book production are only considered as far as they are relevant to the negotiation of the main research questions. A comprehensive investigation into the wider economic implications is not the aim of this research.

I am also aware of the ongoing debate about how digital books impact children's social interaction in education. However, these questions are also outside the scope of the research framework. Therefore, I consider them only as references for the research context but do not discuss them in the thesis.

However, all of the above uncovered areas present potential for future research and practice after the completion of this study. They are touched upon in greater depth in the Reflection section of chapter 4.

Furthermore, the field of appropriation studies is important in a larger context when discussing adaptation studies. However, appropriation studies do not apply to the experiment conducted in my research for the following reasons: As a non-Chinese person adapting a Chinese novel, I am aware of the ongoing discussion in cultural appropriation studies that relates to the adoption or use of elements of one culture by members of another culture. However, as a Vietnamese person growing up in a Chinese-influenced Asian culture, I am not a member of one culture adopting elements of another. Also, my adaptation is certainly not a ‘decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain’.³⁸ The discussions of cultural appropriation, therefore, only help answer the question of how to redefine the parameters of successful adaptation. However, these debates do not serve the experimental adaptation of this research. Thus, I address appropriation studies only within these limitations.

Instead, my theoretical discussion is based on investigation of the capability of visual narratives in digital media; visual adaptations of *Journey to the West* as a local, classic story with universal themes in different media; and the balance between being respectful to the cultural origin of the story while presenting its universalities.

³⁸ Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 26.

Chapter 2

Background and Context Review

Why is it crucial to view digital media as storytelling tools to retell Asian classics to cross-cultural audiences? In fact, scholarly debates show that despite its short history, digital storytelling has flourished in the last few decades and has affected our daily lives in many ways. Henry Jenkins, in *Convergence Culture – Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006) noticed that ‘the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want’.³⁹ Relating digital technologies to storytelling and entertainment, Carolyn Handler Miller admitted that

Throughout this technological revolution, innovative individuals have taken hold of these new tools and used them to create brand-new forms of entertainment.⁴⁰

In such a context, visual narratives in digital media have been explored by enterprises big and small for their potential to serve an audience that can no longer be categorised by citizenship or cultural background. In 2007, Karen Mossberger, Caroline J. Tolbert and Ramona McNeal noted that ‘in much the same way that education has promoted democracy and economic growth, the internet has the potential to benefit society as a

³⁹ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 282.

⁴⁰ Miller, *Digital Storytelling*, 16.

whole, and facilitate the membership and participation of individuals within society'.⁴¹ Yet, there is still a line between this global audience and the cultural contents that transcend the differences between them. How might illustrated e-books help blur the cultural boundaries in this vastly diverse audience? Meanwhile, how might the illustrated e-book storyteller overcome the cultural challenges without forsaking the cultural identities in the narratives? In the previous chapter, we reviewed scholarly discussions by authors such as Henry Jenkins, Gregory Crane, Anastasia Salter, Carolyn Handler Miller and Bryan Alexander. They examined the relationship between the cultural aspects of digital storytelling and the globalisation context we are in. But how can such academic debates lead to practical approaches? And how does the digital globalisation impact the readership?

Through academic discussion and practical experiment, my investigation suggests that although there are opposing attributes and tensions between the 'local' and the 'global' in digital narratives, the negotiation between them can be an essential step in the evolution of storytelling. Digital media, while capable of serving a global audience, also has a unique capability to tell culturally rich local stories. Hence, this research explores the possibility that digital imaging technology, rather than erasing the local to serve the global, can be used to negotiate the balance between them. To put this hypothesis into practice, the research adapts a classic Asian story as a digital book for a digital audience. Considering that the chosen work needs to reflect both local traditions as well as global appeal, my research uses the Chinese novel *Journey to the West* as an

⁴¹ Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal, *Digital Citizenship*, 1.

example of a culturally rich story to adapt for digital media and uses the process of making the adaptation to discuss local vs global digital storytelling. This adaptation process is explored through a hybrid visual storytelling medium that combines elements from other visual media, such as comics, animation and picture books.

Looking into the related aspects of the above arguments, this chapter deals with the research context. First, this context explores the nature of visual narratives in relation to the making of the adaptation. Second, it discusses the local vs global debate in digital storytelling. During the discussion, it touches on the potential of digital imaging technology as a tool to negotiate the tension between the local and the global in digital storytelling. Last but not least, it relates this tension to the context of visual adaptations of Asian classics from the 1940s until recent years.

To find the most suitable narrative structure for the adaptation, at first, this chapter summarises the most commonly used narrative strategies and their impacts. Later, it expands towards the context of visual storytelling and how digital technologies have been employed in the past decade. This contextualisation includes both the general use of the digital in visual narratives and its specific application to Asian classics over the past few decades. Last, it discusses the academic significance of the chosen work, the Chinese novel *Journey to the West*, and its local and global aspects. The discussion briefly introduces *JTW*'s notable visual adaptations and their relevance to the negotiation between local and global. In summary, this context review aims to connect the digital storytelling context, the significance of the chosen story, *JTW* and digital technology's capacity to transcend cultural barriers in local stories. As the overview of narrative types presents many storytelling options for adaptations, the key objective is

to determine which approach most effectively achieves the balance between local and global. To answer this question, I revisit storytelling modes at their most fundamental level.

2.1 Narrative Structures and Impacts

What is a narrative? In his book *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative*, Gerald Prince defines *narrative* as ‘the representation of at least two real or fictive events or situations in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other’.⁴² According to him, at least two events are required in a narrative, and the connection between them must be temporal, not logical, hence the exclusion of a presupposition or entailment relation. In 1994, Peter Lamarque and Olsen further explain what they think *fiction* means in *Truth, Fiction, and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective*:

What distinguishes a work of fiction from works of other kinds? The philosophical question is not about a particular genre, where ‘fiction’ simply means ‘novel’ or ‘popular novel’ in contrast to drama or poetry. It concerns a more fundamental conception of fiction encompassing diverse forms of spoken or written narratives: novels, short stories, dramas, dramatic or epic poems, fantasies, fables, parables, legends, and sagas.⁴³

Lamarque and Olsen remark that although storytelling skills require mastery, the practice of storytelling at the most fundamental level (making up, telling, appreciating and talking about stories) is relatively simple; it is mastered at an early age and is based largely on innate dispositions (imagination, make-believe, play, narrative structuring,

⁴² Prince, *Narratology*, 4.

⁴³ Lamarque and Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature*, 29.

and so forth). These basic narratives skills, which consist of making up stories, telling, repeating, and talking about stories, recognizing them as such, taking up attitudes to them, and responding in appropriate ways, are our innate ability since young, one of the most fundamental and “natural human activities”. With respect to genres in narrative, they also note that ‘the genre (or pragmatic) dimension focuses on the function or point of the narrative, involving the intentions, attitudes, interests, expectations, responses, conventions, and so forth, associated with different kinds of narratives’.⁴⁴

In this same book, they discuss in depth the themes and values of literary works, suggesting that the value of a narrative lies in its ability to stimulate interpretation, for ‘it defines a richer and more rewarding experience... A literary work, in effect, is only as rewarding as the interpretation(s) it can sustain’.⁴⁵ Building upon this point, rather than going deeply into philosophical debates about narratology, this research is more concerned with narrative structures that can facilitate interpretations and a rewarding storytelling experience. In the following sections, I look at the most common narrative structures in Western storytelling and examine two main types of narratives: traditional linear narratives and nonlinear, metonymic narratives. This overview presents the possible narrative structures that can be applied to my adaptation. At the same time, it aims to address the challenge of how digital interactivity can enhance subjective interpretation by readers without losing respect for the original work.

⁴⁴ Lamarque and Olsen, 33.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 21.

In *Poetics*, the Greek philosopher Aristotle suggests that the play structure should be constructed as single whole action with a beginning, middle and end. This action consists of two parts: complication (building up the action) and unravelling (resolving the action).⁴⁶ Later on, German playwright and novelist Gustav Freytag (1896) in his book *Die Technik des Dramas* presented the 5-act dramatic structure, which later became the Freytag's pyramid, which consists of five parts: (1) exposition (or introduction), (2) rising action, (3) climax, (4) falling action, and (5), dénouement (or resolution).⁴⁷ Although the Freytag's pyramid was constructed based on five-act plays, it can be applied to other forms of narrative as well as short stories and novels. For complex narrative structures as screenplays, which sometimes requires episodic structures, Syd Field (2005) emphasises that “if we define a screenplay as a linear arrangement of related incidents, episodes, and events leading to a dramatic resolution, how do we go about building and constructing our story line? How do we build our story line?” Field suggests that other than the beginning, middle, and end, we need connections between ‘plot-points’. ‘The acts may serve as beginning, middle, end. Each act is a unit, or block, of dramatic action, held together with the dramatic context: Set-Up, Confrontation, Resolution.’⁴⁸

From Aristotle, Freytag to Field, we can see a lot in common. However, there are many other narratives that cannot be defined by these structures. Thus, in this section

⁴⁶ Halliwell, *Aristotle's poetics*.

⁴⁷ Freytag, *Freytag's technique of the drama: an exposition of dramatic composition and art*.

⁴⁸ Field, *Screenplay: The foundations of screenwriting*, 200-202.

I discuss two main types of narratives and their storytelling impacts: linear narratives, which can be defined based on Aristotle, Freytag's or Field's suggestions of a story structure; and less-conventional structures that can be non-linear.

Traditional Linear Narratives

As the name suggests, linear narratives follow a straight line, starting at the beginning, moving to the middle and proceeding to the end of the story in a clear, cause-and-effect manner. Many scholars – such as Horace, Gustav Freytag (as discussed earlier) and Joseph Campbell – have adapted narrative modules for linear narratives.

Figure 3: Gustav Freytag's Triangle ⁴⁹

As briefly presented earlier, Gustav's Triangle was first codified by the German writer Gustav Freytag (1816–1895) in the nineteenth century. The structure was explained by Bryan Alexander as 'the customary sequence of exposition or introduction,

⁴⁹ Developed in 1963. Freytag believed that a drama is divided into five parts, or acts: the exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution.

rising action, climax, falling action, and a dénouement'. Alexander (2017) rephrases this description as 'the beginning, middle, and end, or through variations like inception through crisis and resolution'.⁵⁰ According to him, a linear story can be simply understood as 'any media object which demonstrates this clear sequence'. This simple structure is also discussed in Robert McKee's influential screenwriting book *Story* (1997),⁵¹ or the film *Adaptation* (2002),⁵² both of which reference the approach explicitly. In his book, McKee also expands that three-step sequence to include five stages: inciting incident, progressive complications, crisis, climax and resolution.

Another commonly used narrative structure is the hero's journey, the well-known narrative structure developed in 1949 by American scholar Joseph Campbell.⁵³ The hero's journey appears in drama, oral storytelling, religious ritual and psychological development. It describes the typical adventure of the archetypal hero, who goes out and accomplishes great deeds on behalf of the group, tribe or civilisation. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), Campbell claims to have identified a monomyth of a hero's journey, an 'ur-tale' or Jungian archetype with deep, regular underpinnings. The hero is summoned to an extraordinary challenge, faces strenuous and even deadly obstacles, overcomes them and then returns home victoriously. Campbell saw this pattern embodied in myths and ancient stories with local variations, from the lives of Buddha and Christ to Greek epics. Campbell's monomyth is a staple of many storytelling

⁵⁰ Alexander, *The New Digital Storytelling*, 6.

⁵¹ McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting*, Methuen.

⁵² Jonze, *Adaptation*, Columbia Pictures, USA.

⁵³ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Pantheon Books.

approaches, having reached an acme of fame in its association with George Lucas and the (chronologically) first Star Wars movie.⁵⁴ Some schools broaden the hero's journey into a set of myths, or simply the strategy of crafting a story to draw on popular, radical-appearing myths. This is the basis of James Bonnet's screenwriting work, which connects writers to mythic plots in order to create better scripts. In *Story*, screenwriting expert Robert McKee argues that 'an archetypal story creates settings and characters so rare that our eyes feast on every detail, while the telling illuminates conflicts so true to humankind that it journeys from culture to culture'.⁵⁵ All the above scholars and experts seem to agree on one thing: The hero's journey is a model found across cultures and is therefore universally appealing. It reflects conditions and situations that all human beings have to deal with and helps us to recognize, classify and interpret our experiences. As H.A Murray puts it in *The Possible Nature of a "Mythology" to Come*, the hero's journey pattern in mythology portray 'conditions, conflicts, and victories within the soul of man' (1960).⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Alexander, ABC-CLIO.

⁵⁵ McKee, *Story*, 4.

⁵⁶ Murray, 'The Possible Nature of a "Mythology" to Come', in *Myth and Mythmaking*, 300-353.

Figure 4: Joseph Campbell's *A Hero's Journey*.

In the case of *Journey to the West*, the story also presents the universal theme of a hero's journey through the main character Monkey's journey of self-cultivation and enlightenment. Like most classics of literature, *JTW* can be read on many levels. Besides being an epic tale, *JTW* has been read as political and religious satire, as allegory and as fantastical historical fiction. Anthony Yu, in the preface of his unabridged version of *JTW*, *The Monkey and the Monk* (2008), summarises the story as follows:

The skeletal plot of *Journey to the West* (Chin. Xiyouji) was based on the famous pilgrimage of the priest Xuanzang (S96? -664 CE), who travelled overland from Tang China to distant India in quest of additional Buddhist scriptures.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Yu, *The Monkey and the Monk*, x.

In this introduction, Yu admits that *Journey to the West* is indeed a hero's story. He points out that one of the main distinctive features of the fictionalised story is the character Monkey, an animal guardian-attendant who is also endowed with superior intelligence and magical powers that are rooted in various Asian traditions:

The importance assigned to Xuanzang's chief disciple may be seen in the fact that fully seven chapters at the beginning are devoted to relating Sun Wukong's birth and development, his training and attainment in esoteric Taoist self-cultivation, his daring exploits throughout Heaven and Hell that climax in his wreaking horrific havoc at the Celestial Palace-episodes that not only read like those of an independent tale by itself but also have been adapted in fact as such in Beijing opera and other dramatic media.⁶³

Although the main theme of *JTW* is Buddhist, the story also depicts Taoist, Confucian and Buddhist deities living side by side in an amalgamated but coherent cosmology rather than existing as distinct and contradicting visions of the spiritual world. For this particular theme, a linear narrative is often the most suitable approach to employ. Therefore, this linear narrative structure can be seen in most of the story's visual adaptations, as later discussed in chapter 3. However, the aim of my adaptation is not only to narrate this hero's journey but also to employ digital storytelling technologies to create built-in elements that allow readers to infuse their own cultural backgrounds and interpretations. Thus, my research also experiments with narrative approaches that allow readers to assemble the puzzles of the story and fill in the gaps using their own subjective interpretation. Therefore, my adaptation experiments with both traditional linear structures and nonlinear approaches.

Metonymic Nonlinear Narratives

In contrast with linear narratives, nonlinear narratives play with the element of time. They may or may not have a beginning, middle and end. They can start in the middle of the action, and they often hop back and forth through the timeline of events. By presenting various puzzles in the narratives, storytellers use metonyms to create space between the events, which leads their audiences to exercise their subjective imagination and interpretative abilities.

George Lakoff and Mark Turner (2009) refer to metonymic referentiality in narrative fiction as ‘associated with a number of powerful effects achieved by recurring references to a concept, experience or object. The scope of a referent is extended from a single episode to the entire text, assisting in the development of a communicative linguistic interface between writer and reader. Thus, the interpretation depends highly on the experience of the reader.’⁵⁸

Filmmakers have experimented with metonyms in nonlinear structure since the silent film era, with examples including *Intolerance* (1916),⁵⁹ *Strike* (1925)⁶⁰ and *Entr’acte* (1924).⁶¹ Other influential works with fragmented narratives include *Citizen Kane* (1941),⁶² *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959)⁶³ and *L’Année dernière à Marienbad*

⁵⁸ Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason*, 103-104.

⁵⁹ Griffith, *Intolerance*, Triangle Distributing Corporation, USA.

⁶⁰ Eisenstein, *Strike*, Goskino Proletkult, Russia.

⁶¹ Clair, *Entr’acte*, Société Nouvelle des Acacias, France.

⁶² Welles, *Citizen Kane*, RKO Radio Pictures, USA.

⁶³ Resnais, *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, Pathé, France.

(1961).⁶⁴ Most notably, we can look at the unconventional narrative strategy in *Rashomon* (1950)⁶⁵ and what the film established as the *Rashomon effect*.⁶⁶

In *Rashomon* (1950), a samurai is murdered. There are only a few people involved and a few witnesses. Donald Ritchie summarises the narrative as:

The central section of *Rashomon* is an anecdote presented four times, in four different ways. Each member of this triangle (bandit, woman, husband) tells a version, and the fourth is that of the only witness: the woodcutter.⁶⁷

The witnesses all describe the same basic events, but differ wildly in the details, alternately claiming that the samurai died by accident, suicide or murder. The film does not identify an authentic narrator, and at its conclusion, all the versions remain equally plausible and equally suspect. Although this narrative construction creates confusion in the audience, it also allows significant room for interpretation. It is up to each audience member to judge what the truth is and, most importantly, to construct the social context and each character's inner dilemma.

The term *Rashomon effect* refers to the nonlinear structural elements in *Rashomon* that require viewers to put more effort into the film than they are willing to. Audiences hear about the same incident from the various perspectives of different characters. As Ritchie states, '*Rashomon* is a series of flashbacks, all of them both true and false.'⁶⁸ Davis, Anderson, and Walls (2015) discuss that the *Rashomon Narrative*

⁶⁴ Resnais, *L'Année Dernière à Marienbad*, Cocinor, France.

⁶⁵ Kurosawa, *Rashomon*, Daiei Film, Japan.

⁶⁶ Roth and Mehta, 'The Rashomon Effect', 131–72.

⁶⁷ Kurosawa and Richie. *Rashomon*, 4.

⁶⁸ Kurosawa and Richie. 15.

Effect is strongly associated with doubt, ‘a combination of a difference of perspective and equally plausible accounts, with the absence of evidence to elevate one above others, with the inability to disqualify any particular version of the truth, all surrounded by the social pressure for closure on the question.’ More importantly, they point out that the narrative effects do not only lie in uncertainty story events; but it also involves the viewers/participant’s conclusion. ‘This uncertainty is inextricably woven into the certainty of the fact (the man’s body, in this case) around which the *Rashomon effect* usually takes shape. The conclusion reached by a viewer, if any, must be inconclusive.’ The contradictions between the versions open a wide space for readers to judge and construct their own interpretations. They conclude that the *Rashomon effect* is ‘a combination of a difference of perspective and equally plausible accounts, with the absence of evidence to elevate one above others, with the inability to disqualify any particular version of the truth, all surrounded by the social pressure for closure on the question.’⁶⁹

Apparently, for nonlinear metonymic approaches, audiences need to understand the theme of the narrative to hold these segments together and construct an interpretation themselves. However, the way they interpret the narrative also depends on their cultural backgrounds and familiarity with the story’s overall theme.

This approach is relevant to my larger research framework as it can help reflect the cultural diversity of the readership. In other words, this nonlinear approach deals not only with the narrative content, but also with the audience’s subjective interpretations.

⁶⁹ Davis, Anderson, and Walls, eds. *Rashomon effects: Kurosawa, Rashomon and their legacies*, 71.

Therefore, it relates to my theoretical questions: what defines the parameters of a successful visual adaptation; how can the local story of *JTW* be told to a global audience; and how can this adaptation negotiate local and global aspects using digital storytelling?

Thus, in my adaptation of *JTW*, I apply the Rashomon effect to portray the multidimensional Monkey and his journey. By presenting the central hero through the eyes of various witnesses and their personal stories, the adaptation enables the audience to see the hero and the events from different perspectives and avoids conveying any particular judgements. This approach can help bring audiences into another key aspect of the narrative: constructing a visual image of Monkey from their own interpretations and thereby becoming part of the storytelling. In that sense, aspects of character design and the perception of the storytelling itself are intrinsically linked.

Figure 5: Stills from *Rashomon* (1950). Different narrators give contradicting versions of the same event.

On the one hand, nonlinear narrative lends itself to the use of interactive media in digital storytelling. By interacting with certain parts of the story, audiences can input their subjective interpretations. Such a feature allows the adaptation to address the cultural diversity in the readership as readers navigate the universally appealing hero's journey linear structure. On the other hand, the research can control the choices provided to the audience. This regulates the visual consistency and overall aesthetic of the adaptation as it represents local traditions in the storytelling. The chosen medium for

my adaptation is an illustrated e-book with limited animations; its language is visually driven. The following section will examine the impact of visual narratives in digital storytelling.

2.2 Visual Narratives in Digital Media

Visual Impact in Digital Narratives

Visual language can offer a narrative impact that cannot be achieved solely through words. Since the beginning of the history of books, illustrations have been used to enrich the written narrative. Book illustrations can aid the narrative tremendously, particularly in telling complex stories.

Will Eisner (1985) emphasises the impact of graphic storytelling and in particular, sequential graphic narratives. According to him, words and images ‘are derivatives of a single origin and in the skilful employment of words and images lies the expressive potential of the medium’.⁷⁰ Similar to Lemarque and Olsen, A. Kibedi Varga states in *Stories Told by Pictures* (1988) that the image ‘is not a second way of telling the tale, but a way of evoking it’.⁷¹

A picture can be worth a thousand words; that is, a visual sometimes reveals themes and meanings that cannot be described in words. Ann Marie Seward Barry (1997) states that ‘it is images, not words, that communicate most deeply’⁷² and remarks

⁷⁰ Eisner, *Comics & Sequential Art*, 2.

⁷¹ Varga, ‘Stories Told by Pictures’, 194–208.

⁷² Barry, *Visual Intelligence*, 75.

particularly with respect to comics that ‘when an image is combined with words as in a comic strip, the words become secondary, but the language of images remains primary’.⁷³ Robin Varnum and Christina T. Gibbons (2007) relate the relationship of word and image in the contemporary context and conclude that we are now images-driven. They believe that ‘the balance of power between words and images which, after the invention of the printing press, shifted in favour of the word, seems now to be shifting in favour of the image’.⁷⁴ In *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1993), Scott McCloud states that words are totally abstract icons, while in pictures, meaning is ‘fluid and variable’ and therefore holds more expressive capacity.⁷⁵ Referring to the visual impact of illustration, Marie-Laure Ryan sums it up this way: ‘Illustrations do not simply evoke pre-existing narrative images but also create a symbiotic relation with the verbal version’ (2004).⁷⁶ That explains why visual images have been used not only to illustrate the text, but in media such comics and animations employed as the primary tool of storytelling.

⁷³ Ibid, 78.

⁷⁴ Varnum and Gibbons, *The Language of Comics*, ix.

⁷⁵ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 28.

⁷⁶ Ryan, *Narrative across Media*, 139.

Figure 6: A page from *American Born Chinese* (2006)⁷⁷

However, captivating as it is, visual narrative faces the same problem as written narrative, namely, that it communicates with audiences in a ‘one-way process’. Russell C. Long (1980) diagnoses one of the major problematic beliefs in creative writing regarding writers and audiences: ‘The written word-especially the printed world - is seen as a fixed and passive artefact’.⁷⁸ Does that mean writers’ and illustrators’ work seems

⁷⁷ Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 10.

⁷⁸ Long, ‘Writer-Audience Relationships’, 221–26.

to end when the work is completed and delivered to the audience? If so, how the audience responds and connects with the work is often beyond the creator's control. However, that conventional concept has been challenged. John Fiske (1992) believes popular culture has expanded this relationship between readers and authors through fandom. All audiences, according to him, engage in production, not mere reception. The connection between storytellers, works of fiction and audiences, therefore, becomes much more complex in pop culture as it 'encourages identification and participation by audience members through fandom, fans construct coherent identities for themselves'.⁷⁹ In this process, they go through a cultural activity of their own making. I would add that digital storytelling and interactive media have expanded that relationship even more widely by actively engaging the audience in the use of storytelling tools in interactive media. Henry Jenkins has pointed out a number of these communities and subcultures in his research of 'participatory culture' and asserted that we can no longer draw a clear line between producer and consumer.⁸⁰ Yet, the complex relationship between digital storytellers and digital audiences also presents another challenge. Given that the audience can no longer be restricted by location, culture, age or social background, how can the storytellers produce content that transcends cultural barriers and achieves a global appeal? If that is the goal, will we have to abandon the local, or cultural, aspects of their content?

⁷⁹ Fiske, Lewis and Waldron, *The Adoring Audience*, 3.

⁸⁰ Jenkins, 'Textual Poachers', 278.

Cultural Representation through Visual Narratives in the Context of Globalisation

In *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metaphysical Paradox* (1980), Linda Hutcheon discusses how narrative strategies can invite audiences to enter the fictional worlds of stories by using their subjectivity to fill the narrative gaps:

As the reader progresses through any novel, the effect of the author's guiding rhetoric, of the narrator's meditation, and of the accumulation of fictive referents, is to force him to bridge the gap between his own world and the potential fictional universe.⁸¹

In digital storytelling, which is available to anyone with internet access, the approach used to engage readers faces the diversity of the readership. Here, we have the negotiation of two opposing aspects: the internet in a globalisation context and the local affiliations of each individual reader. In other words, the narrative content is accessible globally, but how readers interpret the 'gaps' will depend on their cultural backgrounds.

In the article 'Globality and Modernity', Robertson (1992) describes the terms *local* and *global* using the media example of television. He points out the interrelated relationship of globalisation and localisation in television. Robertson believes television adopts globally distributed forms to create cultural products, which define and redefine what the national and the local are. He observes that 'globalization has involved the reconstruction, in a sense the production, of "home", "community" and "locality"'. Cultural producers "use forms and genres that have spread globally to express ideas of what home is like." There is a subtle interplay between the global and local in television

⁸¹ Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, 140.

form and content. A global form is being localized, for the adoption of global media development and for the expression of local identity'.⁸²

Cultural representation in cross-cultural adaptations naturally leads us to the discussion of appropriation. Theorist Linda Hutcheon, in *A Theory of Adaptation*, concludes that appropriation is a part of adaptation since adaptation includes 'a creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/savaging'.⁸³ This involves, to some extent, the eradication of the original authorship. In the film *Adaptation*,⁸⁴ screenwriter Charlie Kaufman's character is troubled by his responsibility as an adapter to an author and a book he respects. Hutcheon points out from there that adapting 'can be a process of appropriation, of taking possession of another's story, and filtering it, in a sense, through one's own sensibility, interests, and talents'.⁸⁵ Although my discussion leans on her definition of adaptation, I do not include discussions of appropriation in my research for the following main reason: As defined by Julie Sanders, appropriation relates to adaptation but has clear distinctions. According to her, adaptation 'signals a relationship with an informing source-text or original'. On the other hand, appropriation

frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain. This may or may not involve a generic shift, and it may still require the intellectual juxtaposition of (at least) one text against another that we have suggested is central to the reading and spectating experience of adaptations.⁸⁶

⁸² Robertson, 'Globality and Modernity', 153–61.

⁸³ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 8.

⁸⁴ Jonze, *Adaptation*, Columbia Pictures, USA.

⁸⁵ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 18.

⁸⁶ Sanders, 26.

With that definition, Sanders addresses the key difference in adaptation and appropriation as the degree of cultural reference taken from the source text. For instance, both the comic *American Born Chinese* (2006) by Gene Luen Yang and the Japanese media franchise *Dragon Ball* (1984)⁸⁷ take references from the Chinese novel *Journey to the West*. They borrow the characters' names and personalities as well as details from the novel's cosmology and take liberty in turning the known story into complete narratives for non-Chinese audiences. However, *American Born Chinese's* story of Monkey (which will be discussed more extensively in chapter 3) relates more to adaptation than appropriation because it connects to the source text and the Chinese cosmology. *Dragon Ball*, on the other hand, is not tied to the source text and pays little homage to the Chinese culture. The story and characters are indeed Japanese and not Chinese. In the *Dragon Ball* story-world, the reference from the source text does not affect the narratives. It is worth stating here that taking possession of the *JTW* story was never my intention. On the contrary, one of the main goals of my adaptation is to highlight the cultural aspects of *JTW* and its Chinese traditions. Although the medium suggests that my adaptation needs to serve a global audience, the main aim is to negotiate the global appeal while still honouring the local identity of the source text. Both my theoretical discussion and my practical experiment explore how this negotiation can be achieved using the medium of illustrated e-books. All my creative decisions during the making of this new adaptation are driven by a desire to connect to the local traditions, not by any means to savage them. The result, therefore, is not

⁸⁷ Toriyama, *Dragon Ball*, Shueisha.

culturally appropriated, but transculturally adapted from the source text. The challenge of appropriation brings us to the example of *Mulan* (1998)⁸⁸ and the accusations the film suffered in academic debates. Lisa Brocklebank (2000) calls the film a product of ‘Disneyfication’ of a marginal and subversive form such as the folktale.⁸⁹ Jing Yin, in *Popular Culture and Public Imaginary: Disney vs. Chinese Stories of Mulan* (2011), claims that Disney’s appropriation simultaneously reinforced the existing racial and gender ideologies by deprecating Chinese culture as an Oriental despotism and dissolving feminism into the cultural/racial hierarchy.⁹⁰ Although I am aware of the academic debates about appropriation studies related to adaptations, my discussion does not go into appropriation for the following reasons: First, the majority of my chosen case studies are made by Chinese storytellers for either Chinese markets or transcultural audiences. There is not one case study appropriated by a non-Chinese production. Second, although non-Chinese, I am a Vietnamese storyteller. The close ties between the Chinese and Vietnamese cultures are well recognised. For more than two thousand years, Vietnam – like Korea, Japan and China – was a member of what might appropriately be called the East Asian classical civilisation. At about the same time that the British Isles were incorporated into Roman Europe by Julius Caesar and his successors, the ancestors of the modern Vietnamese people, then living in the Red River

⁸⁸ Cook and Bancroft, *Mulan*, Buena Vista Pictures, USA.

⁸⁹ Brocklebank, ‘Disney’s “Mulan”’, 268–83.

⁹⁰ Yin, ‘Popular Culture and Public Imaginary’, 53–74.

Delta of northern Vietnam, were conquered by Chinese armies and drawn into the ambit of the early Chinese empire.

From the first century to the tenth century, when it finally broke away and established its independence, northern Vietnam was a dependency of the Chinese empire. Over this span of nine hundred years, the Vietnamese people received a comprehensive initiation into the scholarship, political theories, familial organization patterns, bureaucratic practices, and even the religious orientation of Chinese culture.⁹¹

Born Vietnamese, I first heard of *Journey to the West* at the age of six and am familiar with most of the East Asian pop-culture adaptations of the story. Considering my culturally related background, I argue that my adaptation cannot be seen as an appropriation.

Therefore, I am not engaging in the discussion of appropriation studies. Nevertheless, the academic debates about appropriation relate to the negotiation of local vs global in my theoretical discussion. The negotiation involves what has been discussed as *transculturality* in visual culture. In the essay *Transculturality – The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today* (1999), Wolfgang Welsch points out how our concept of ‘culture’ has changed with the growth of communication and stresses that ‘cultural determinants today - from society's macro level through to individuals' micro level - have become transcultural’. In other words, cultures today are interconnected and entangled with each other and are generally characterised by ‘hybridisation’. In the context of visual culture, Welsch believes transculturality ‘goes beyond the seemingly hard alternatives of globalization and particularization’. Based on this understanding, transculturality can ‘cover global and local, universalistic and particularistic aspects... The globalizing

⁹¹ Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, 7.

tendencies as well as the desire for specificity and particularity can be fulfilled within transculturality'.⁹² Other scholars also share this idea. As Julia Binter stated in 2013, 'getting at the transcultural does not necessarily entail the sacrifice of cultural differences in favour of a notion of abstract shared humanity'.⁹³ In such a context, in dealing with transcultural adaptations of local stories such as the Asian classics, how can we negotiate the universal appeal and the cultural identities they must represent?

2.3 Transcultural Adaptations of Asian Classics in the Context of Digital Storytelling

Transcultural Adaptations

Lamarque and Olsen noticed one of the deciding factors of a narrative is its capability to stimulate interpretation, resulting in adaptations. In other words, adaptations reflect our demand to revisit a story we like and seek its variations. A retold story as it is, an adaptation also needs to stand on its own. George Kubler points out in his book *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History* (1962) that 'human desires in every present instance are torn between the replica and the invention'.⁹⁴ Based on his claims, Linda Hutcheon concludes that adaptations satisfy both those needs, offering us the repetition and the delight of surprise. Just as we crave comfort food, we like to hear a

⁹² Welsch, 194–213.

⁹³ Binter, 'Radioglaz and the Global City', in *Transcultural Montage*, 183.

⁹⁴ Kubler, *The Shape of Time*, 72.

familiar story again and again, looking for both the familiarity – the comforting knowledge of what happens next – as well as the surprise that gives us new insight into the story.⁹⁵ According to Kubler and Hutcheon, both needs are ingrained in the human psyche and are therefore universal. This explains why adaptations remain popular across different storytelling traditions around the world.

When a story is adapted from one country to another, we are looking at transcultural adaptation. It has been practised between cultures and widely discussed among scholars. However, in the context of ‘cultural globalization’, as Kraidy calls it (2002),⁹⁶ it has received much greater attention. As introduced earlier, transcultural adaptation not only involves apparent changes such as language, context, time and place, but also consists of political issues and questions regarding cultural preservation and representation. When a story travels from one country to another, it needs to mutate to serve a new audience. Understanding the new context and the new audience is crucial in the process of making a transcultural adaptation.

Digital Readership and Interactive Storytelling

However, in the landscape of convergent digital storytelling, we can no longer classify the audience based only on its geography, race or culture. This new audience is now a group known as *digital citizens*. It has emerged over the past decades alongside the growth of the Web as a multinational, multiracial and multicultural group. Karen

⁹⁵ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 145–148.

⁹⁶ Kraidy, ‘Hybridity in Cultural Globalization’, 316–39.

Mossberger, Caroline Tolbert and Ramona McNeal, in the book entitled *Digital Citizenship: The Internet, Society, and Participation* (2007), define digital citizens as those ‘who use the Internet regularly and effectively—that is, on a daily basis’.⁹⁷

According to Carolyn Handler Miller in *Digital Storytelling: A Creator's Guide to Interactive Entertainment*, to understand this audience, we need to look at the larger context of digital storytelling with its ‘array of entertainment experiences’ (Miller 2014). In the same book, Miller’s definition of digital storytelling ranges from ‘online role-playing games involving hundreds of thousands of players; talking dolls with artificial intelligence; virtual reality simulations; hypertext fictions, digital illustrated books, action games on mobile devices; and interactive cinema on full scale theatrical movie screens’.⁹⁸ Digital storytelling is no longer seen merely as traditional storytelling in digital format. As the latest digital technologies redefine communication, they reshape the relationship between the storytellers, the audience and the stories.

In such a context, digital storytelling ‘reaches its audience via digital technology and media—microprocessors, wireless signals, the Web, and so on’. Besides all of the capabilities it inherits from traditional storytelling, interactivity ‘is one of its hallmarks’. Miller (2014) observes:

The first storytellers had only a single simple tool at their disposal—the spoken word—while later storytellers had more sophisticated methods of spinning tales, using actors, music, sound effects, and ultimately, filmed images. But digital storytellers, the newcomers in this long line of narrative artists, have an additional tool in their toolkit, something even more potent: interactivity.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal, 1.

⁹⁸ Miller, *Digital Storytelling*, 14–15.

⁹⁹ Miller, 8.

With interactivity, digital storytelling presents a space for the storytellers and the audience to connect and co-create not only stories but also universes. Older media cannot support interactivity – back-and-forth communication between the audience and the material. This is a radical difference between older media and new media.

Within only a few decades, digital storytelling, once a niche activity, has spread throughout media platforms and acquired a worldwide consumer base that reaches millions, the majority of whom are young people. This demographic has grown up with digital technology and demands more from its storytelling experience. Answering to the needs or, to be more precise, anticipating the needs of this demographic is tough but essential for storytellers nowadays. Would the local identities be obscured in such a context? In addition, how does interactivity relate to global accessibility and diversity in the readership?

Sitting in the context of digital storytelling, transcultural adaptation has grown into ‘cross-media productions, intended to work as a storytelling approach in conjunction with other media’. Janet Murray (2011) has written about the ‘encyclopaedic capacity’ of digital media, which she thinks will lead to new narrative forms as audiences seek information beyond the limits of the individual story and go towards ‘world-making’, a participatory experience in which the media consumer becomes co-creator.¹⁰⁰

Assuming that transcultural adaptations need to satisfy the new demands of the digital readership, local storytellers now need to consider two game-changers in their

¹⁰⁰ Murray, *Inventing the Medium*, 66.

narratives: interactivity and the internet. While the internet can present a local story to a global audience, interactivity lets storytellers engage the participation of this culturally diverse readership. Connecting these two new features and adaptations' demands of repetition and innovation, we find endless potential for cultural exchange in digital storytelling platforms. For example, by playing an interactive game adapted from *JTW* or *Ramayana*, cross-cultural players can explore not only the two great examples of Chinese and Indian classics, but also the cultural traditions of these two countries. A story from one culture told digitally lends itself to the participatory and interactive nature of the medium. Localisation, therefore, is defined not only by the storytellers, but also by each individual audience's interpretation. With the participatory nature of digital storytelling platforms, the audience's interpretations can also be shared with other audiences and storytellers in a feedback loop. On the one hand, this unique capacity removes total control of the intended content from the storytellers. On the other hand, it opens up a space of co-creation wherein culturally diverse audiences can play their part in the transcultural adaptation process.

Having said that, the participatory nature of interactive storytelling might face a major challenge with respect to content. If freedom is given to the audience in a transcultural adaptation, is there a way to overcome the dichotomy between the reader's participation and the author's intention? Is there a way to keep the storytellers in control of the content while offering the audience a substantial contribution? For example, if a non-Chinese audiences unfamiliar with *JTW* are given many choices to act as the Monkey King in an interactive game adaptation of the story, they may take the narrative off track culturally or obscure the source text. In the first scenario, they might use the

Monkey King character to insult the Jade Emperor or kill the King of Hell, who are both respected figures in Chinese culture. In the second scenario, they might choose to make Monkey the new emperor of Heaven instead of leaving him under the mountain for redemption. While these choices seem natural to the gamer, they would neglect, first, the culture, and second, the source text. In reference to this challenge, Hartley and McWilliam acknowledge that

now, everyone with access to a computer can not only “sing” for themselves, they can also personally publish the results to everyone else. The shift from the broadcast to the interactive era, from analogue to digital technologies, and from expert/professional production to DIY or ‘consumer-generated’ content – from ‘read-only’ to ‘read-and-write’ media, for consumers as well as professionals – has opened up the idea of the ‘bardic function’ to new interpretation, and to a new challenge.¹⁰¹

Therefore, a new interpretation might result in what they call an ‘amateur’, DIY, or consumer-created content. Thus, the challenge is to understand how such a ‘diffused system might work to propagate coherent sense across social boundaries, among different demographics, and throughout social hierarchies’. In other words, how does a fully distributed narrative system retain overall systemic unity?

Drawing the line between the interactive mode and digital storytelling, Mark Riedl and Andrew Stern defined interactive narrative as ‘an approach to interactive entertainment that enables the player to make decisions that directly affect the direction and/or outcome of the narrative experience being delivered by the computer system.

¹⁰¹ Hartley and McWilliam, 24.

Interactive narrative requires two seemingly conflicting requirements: coherent narrative and user agency'.¹⁰²

In addition, Marie-Laure Ryan (2001) breaks down interactivity in digital narratives into layers based on the level of responsiveness of the system to the user. Interactivity bridges the traditional space between book and game, where the needs of storytelling are balanced with the denser (and technical ability) to create a dialogue between story, reader, and author.¹⁰³ Notable examples are *Choose Your Own Adventure* books, which are conventionally published paper books that allow the reader to change the story by making choices that prompt them to turn to different pages and *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch*,¹⁰⁴ a new Netflix movie spun off from the show *Black Mirror* that allows the viewer to make choices in a way that's very similar to a *Choose Your Own Adventure* book.¹⁰⁵ In this territory, the audience is given choices to encounter different elements in the fictional world. Each individual might have his or her own unique experience of the narrative. However, the reader's choices, in the end, are still created by the creator. It is up to the creator to decide whether or not the choices given to the audience affect the narrative.

In such a context, the storytellers and image-makers are equipped with many such tools to engage with their audience. Moreover, the storytelling process can be an

¹⁰² Riedl and Stern, 'Believable Agents', in *International Conference on Technologies*, 1–12.

¹⁰³ Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, 176.

¹⁰⁴ Slade, *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch*. Netflix, USA.

¹⁰⁵ Packard, Edward, et al. *Choose Your Own Adventure* (1979-1998) is a series of children's gamebooks where each story is written from a second-person point of view.

effective way to present their own cultures and traditions to a culturally diverse audience. The audience, in turn, is no longer relegated to the passive mode, but can interact in the storytelling itself. This shift in the storyteller–audience relationship presents a great potential for adapting classic Asian stories with a rich cultural heritage.

The Demand for Transcultural Adaptations of Asian Classics

Throughout Asia, classic novels and folktales have been adapted in all media, not only in their countries of origin but also in nearby regions. In *Mangasia: The Definitive Guide to Pan-Asian Comic Art* (2017), Paul Gravett documents that contemporary Chinese storytellers still devote big productions to bring back the countries' four classic canons, including *Journey to the West*, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Dream of the Red Chamber* and *Water Margin*.¹⁰⁶ Early visual adaptations of *Journey to the West* can be found in China's Republican period (1912–49) as early comics from the 1920s and 1930s. In 1941, Shanghai Film Studio made China's first animated film, *Princess Iron Fan*, adapted from a chapter in *Journey to the West*. They later went on to adapt the story's first seven chapters into *Uproar in Heaven* (1965), marking China's golden age in animation. In Japan, Yokoyama Mitsuteru dedicated nearly twenty years to adapting *Water Margin* (1967–71) and *Three Kingdoms* (1971–86). In 1984, China produced one of its most popular and longest-running shows of all time, a live-action TV series of *Journey to the West*. In the 1990s, Hong Kong filmmaker Stephen Chow made a two-part film adaptation of the same story, *A Chinese Odyssey*

¹⁰⁶ Gravett, *Mangasia*, Thames & Hudson.

(1994–95), which won over Asia. Besides in China, *Journey to the West* has been adapted in other countries. One example is the Japanese television series *Monkey*, produced by Nippon TV and International Television Films in the late 1970s. The series was dubbed into English in 1979 and broadcast in the United Kingdom and New Zealand, helping to bring the story of *JTW* to Western audiences. Recent contemporary adaptations of *JTW* include the US television series *The New Legends of Monkey*, released in early 2018 with an international cast, and the modern fantasy sitcom *A Korean Odyssey*, released in late 2017 in Korea with a modern-day setting.

The same is true for the two greatest Sanskrit tales of Hinduism, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. In 1967, Anant Pai (1929–2011) brought this epic to life again as a comic book in the series Amar Chitra Katha. In the twenty-first century, the story was retold by Deepak Chopra (1947–) and Virgin boss Richard Branson (1950–) in a contemporary adaptation that also attracted non-Indian audiences. Asian traditional tales not only attract the audiences of their own origin, but have crossed borders through transcultural adaptation.

Outside Asia, visual adaptations of these classics have proven popular among non-Asian audiences as well. A few notable examples are English director Peter Brook's stage play, *The Mahabharata* (1985), which was followed by a film in 1989; American comic artist Gene Yang's *American Born Chinese* in 2006, a contemporary comic adaptation of *Journey to the West*; and Pixar artist Divine Loophole's *Ramayana* in 2010. As visual adaptations of these classics continue to proliferate outside Asia, they offer a glance at Asian cultures and philosophy. They represent local traditions that are still unfamiliar to non-Asian audiences while presenting entertaining and relatable

stories to audiences of all ages and cultures. For instance, *Journey to the West* presents the ‘hero’s journey’¹⁰⁷ and the path to self-realisation, *Mahabharata* discusses the natural law of cause and consequences, and Japan’s *The Tale of Genji* and India’s *Ramayana* portray love between the sexes. In most of these excellent transcultural adaptations, however, the storytellers are still fully in control of the narrative contents as well as the reader’s experience. In the next section, we will explore possible challenges that prevent transcultural storytellers from pushing the boundaries.

Challenges to Adapting Asian Classics for Global Audiences

The recent changes in digital publishing present two opposing tendencies in the retelling of classic literature. On the one hand, there is an increase in large-scale productions, transmedia franchises meant for global distribution. On the other hand, small-scale productions, including local, independent storytellers and publishers, have also become more active in preserving their local identities. As I discussed earlier in the book industry context, small local productions promote diversity and help retain dignity by bringing their community identity into the storytelling. Therefore, they need a simple, effective medium that allows them to present their cultural stories to the demanding digital readership. In such a context, digital media not only presents a cost-effective solution, but also gives them a chance to compete with big media franchises (which are often inclined towards homogeneity). The next imperative question is, Which digital

¹⁰⁷ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Pantheon Books.

media suit small productions' visual adaptations while fulfilling the 'interactivity cravings' of digital citizens?

In *Adaptation in Contemporary Culture: Textual Infidelities* (2009), Cathlena Martin notes that one of the current challenges of adaptation studies is taking into consideration the elements that are redefining cultural works, including 'intertextuality, transmedia crossing and convergence'.¹⁰⁸ Another scholar, Lars Ellestrom (2013) believes that in today's context, 'adaptation is probably the most vigorously researched area within the study of transmedial transfer'.¹⁰⁹ Thus, in *Adaptation within the Field of Media Transformations*, Ellestrom asks for 'a theoretical framework into which adaptation must be placed: the transfer and transformation of form and content between all kinds of art forms and media'. Linda Hutcheon also suggests looking at adaptation through a creative and interpretative process taking place within a variety of media and cultural phenomena.¹¹⁰

Regarding the rapid development of convergence media that enables the readership's participation in the storytelling, scholar Jean Burgess (2006) points out how readers are considered by convergence media as 'creative consumers' and there has been 'a rapid increase of late in interest around consumer participation in media culture'.¹¹¹ The context of these two fields shows us that the challenges highlighted by adaptation studies are being answered by convergence of media. Henry Jenkins, in *Convergence*

¹⁰⁸ Martin, 'Charlotte's Website', in *Adaptation in Contemporary Culture*, 85–95.

¹⁰⁹ Elleström, 'Adaptation within the Field of Media Transformations', in *Adaptation Studies*, 113–32.

¹¹⁰ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 22–23.

¹¹¹ Burgess, 'Hearing Ordinary Voices', 201–14.

Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide (2006), believes that in the future, transmedia storytelling will become more intuitive and even lead to ‘the next step in that process of cultural evolution - a bridge to a new kind of culture and a new kind of society’. To support this claim, he stresses that ‘media companies will offer us the chance to buy into new kinds of experiences with new characters and new worlds’.¹¹²

However, interactive storytelling also raises a valid concern when applied to transcultural adaptation: if media consumers explore the content freely without the creators’ control, how can the original stories’ ideology and cultural heritage be preserved? Linda Hutcheon believes that for an adaptation to be successful in its own right, it must be accompanied by knowledge of the original work, by ‘both knowing and unknowing audiences’.¹¹³

Bringing this requirement into digital storytelling, wherein the unknowing audience is able to alter the narrative, how can the storyteller integrate knowledge of the adapted text and maintain control of the story’s coherence? In other words, in transcultural adaptations, how can the audience’s participation be balanced with the core elements of the original work? These are the fundamental questions that local storytellers need to address.

Through theory and practice, my research seeks answers to the above questions using a transcultural approach. The making of my adaptation examines how authors can engage with their culturally diverse audiences. The research also investigates how

¹¹² Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 130.

¹²² Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 120.

certain parts of narratives can deliver global appeal while leaving space for interpretation. The culturally diverse readers' interpretations then reflect their local identities. This can answer the challenge of digital storytelling that Hartley and McWilliam posed earlier, 'to understand how such a diffused system might work to propagate coherent sense across social boundaries, among different demographics, and throughout social hierarchies'¹¹⁴ while maintaining systemic unity. To do so, my adaptation uses the medium of an illustrated e-book that enables unity (which is defined by the author) as well as engaging readers' interactivity.

Illustrated E-Books for Mobile Devices as the Game-Changer

For further discussion, it is useful to remember the earlier finding that an adaptation's attraction consists of its familiarity as well as its originality. A transcultural adaptation is not merely a conversation between the adapter and the source text. It also engages an audience that may or may never have known about the work previously. Therefore, if a transcultural adaptation intends to present local traditions to a larger audience, the objective should certainly be articulated and controlled by the storyteller. If the audience is given too much liberty in their interactive participation, the adaptation may result in countless interpretations but fall short in presenting the cultural aspects. For example, a non-Chinese reader of a *JTW* adaptation might not have the cultural knowledge to understand that while Monkey behaves very arrogantly and wreaks havoc in Heaven, the Heaven gods still need to be respected. He can only challenge the gods,

¹²³ Hartley and McWilliam, 24.

but should never insult them harshly, for this would be culturally inappropriate. If too much liberty is given to the reader, he might choose to let Monkey do so, which would sabotage the heritage of the source text.

This challenge is particularly evident in the case of digital game adaptations, wherein the storytelling relies heavily on players' choices. For instance, from 1990s, many attempts have been made by both Asian and Western productions to bring back the Chinese classic *Journey to the West* as a digital game, but without any remarkable success. A few examples are Gametec's *Legend of Wukong* (1996),¹¹⁵ Ninja Theory's adventure game *Enslaved: Odyssey to the West* (2010),¹¹⁶ the PlayStation game *Monkey Magic* (Source 2000)¹¹⁷ and the recent iPad book *The Monkey King* (2013).¹¹⁸

Among these examples, the last one delivers, to a great extent, the presentation of Chinese traditions in a complex story. Its text, as well as its visual coherence, attract both Asian and non-Asian audiences who are unfamiliar with the story. The creator is clearly in control of the adaptation's content. However, its limited, random interactivity fails to engage readers to co-create the adaptation.

¹¹⁵ Gametec, *Legend of Wukong*, Sega Mega Drive/Genesis, 1996, Windows and MACOS.

¹¹⁶ Ninja Theory, *Enslaved: Odyssey to the West*, 2010, Xbox 360 and Playstation3.

¹²⁶ Electro Source, *Monkey Magic*, 2000, PlayStation.

¹¹⁸ The Pinnacles Interactive, *The Monkey King*, 2013, iPad App.

Figure 7: Gametec's adventure game *Legend of Wukong* (1996).

This game adopts the visual style and mechanics of Nintendo's adventure games. Although a few characters are based on *JTW*, the narrative content presents very little of the original story.

Figure 8: Ninja Theory's digital game *Enslaved: Odyssey to the West* (2010).

The game is rendered in a realistic 3D style. Although it presents a very convincing virtual world, the content and characters are influenced by mainstream sci-fi games. Apart from calling the main character Monkey King, the game does not present Chinese cultural elements or ideas from *JTW*.

As stated above, one of the major challenges of interactive storytelling mode in transcultural adaptation is content control. If too much freedom is given to the audience in a transcultural adaptation, who controls the authenticity of its cultural aspects and the references to the source text? Is there a way to maintain storyteller control of the content while allowing the audience to substantially contribute?

Mark Riedl and Andrew Stern define an *interactive narrative* as 'an approach to interactive entertainment that enables the player to make decisions that directly affect the direction and/or outcome of the narrative experience being delivered by the

computer system. Interactive narrative requires two seemingly conflicting requirements: coherent narrative and user agency'.¹¹⁹

Some interactive media are certainly less flexible than others when it comes to narrative control. Hypertext fiction and interactive fiction rely heavily on players' text commands to control characters and influence the environment. Digital games involve problem-solving and world-building more than rigidly structured narratives. Virtual reality theatre can offer an extensive immersive space but might not be accessible to the global audience. Furthermore, its demanding production might not suit independent, budget-constrained local productions.

The medium of illustrated e-books, in contrast, is rooted in the conventional literature tradition in which the audience expects a solid, predefined narrative structure. In other words, an illustrated e-book is still a book, where a narrative is fixed and predetermined. In such a narrative, randomness created by the readers' interactivity may cause incoherence that disrupts the narrative.

In *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*, Ryan examines the differences between the traditional and interactive literature. She documents how reading has changed from a culture of immersive ideals – getting lost in a good book, for example – to a culture more concerned with interactivity. As Ryan considers the fate of traditional narrative patterns in digital culture, she revisits one of the central issues in modern literary theory – the opposition between a presumably passive reading that is taken over by the world a text represents

¹¹⁹ Riedl and Stern, 'Believable Agents', 1–12.

and an active, deconstructive reading that imaginatively participates in the text's creation.¹²⁰

Therefore, in an illustrated e-book where the fixed narrative is anticipated by the readers, interactive engagement and limited animations can be added, but will not necessarily lead to countless unpredictable versions of the story. They do not require as much animation and user interaction as games and virtual simulations. Thus, the production can be more manageable for small enterprises. Having considered the accessibility and production factors, this research suggests the possibility of using illustrated e-books as a transcultural medium for visual adaptations of classic literature.

Figure 9: Interactivity in different narrative modes.

A comparison of how interactivity with players' narrative choices leads to many different narrative possibilities, as in games or hypertext fiction (left), and how visual assets can be added into illustrated e-books as personalisation options that result in multiple presentations of a fixed narrative (right).

No more than ten years ago, the public, as well as storytellers, were still unfamiliar with or sceptical about mobile reading devices. However, according to game

¹²⁰ Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, Johns Hopkins University Press.

scholar Anastasia Salter, ‘as hardware has changed, its forms have pushed works into particular shapes. But perhaps no hardware evolution in this varied past will prove as important to interactive narrative as the introduction of the tablet’.¹²¹ William J. Mitchell (2003) also notices that digital books, despite their limitations, have been ‘too seductive to ignore’.¹²² They grant access anytime, anywhere in the world. They are cost effective. Unlike traditional printed books, on the Web, digital books can be produced by very small publishers, achieving instant worldwide distribution.

In particular, the iPad, followed by other tablet readers, since its release in 2010, interactive narratives and the increased accessibility of those tools have allowed a broad range of storytellers to build on these emerging models for literary interaction.

Undoubtedly, the latest technologies have brought more and more potential for audience engagement and participation in storytelling. However, the challenge of authorship remains. Within the framework of my narrative control, there are still opposing needs: readers’ autonomy and the author’s domination, which can ensure a local presentation of the narrative. For instance, in adaptations of *JTW*, if readers are free to drive the narrative, the story could end with the Monkey King killing Buddha or destroying the Heaven gods, which is certainly a cultural misrepresentation. If a digital adaptation of *JTW* prioritises only interactivity and universal appeal without paying respect to the story’s cultural heritage, it may appropriate rather than adapt the source text. It would be, as described earlier, a process that ‘affects a more decisive journey

¹²¹ Salter, 157.

¹²² Mitchell, ‘Homer to Home-Page’, 203.

away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain'.¹²³ Instead, my practice explores the possibility that in illustrated e-books, the two forces of audience interaction and storyteller authorship can work in tandem. In other words, the navigation and narrative experience and the author's intended cultural presentation do not necessarily contradict but complement each other.

What makes illustrated books for mobile reading devices a particularly suitable solution for presenting classic literature? There is no doubt that each digital medium presents a unique storytelling capability that resonates with the digital audience. However, illustrated e-books can overcome many challenges of transcultural adaptation of classic literature. Unlike games and hypertext fiction, in which the narratives rely fully on players' actions, an illustrated e-book can retain the predetermined narrative structure of a book. It can include simple interactivity and player choices. For instance, an interactive game adaptation of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* can construct the comprehensive world of the Three Kingdoms and a role-playing experience for the players. However, the way they play in such a narrative world largely depend on their actions and choices.

On the other hand, an illustrated e-book adaptation of the same story can still provide a visually satisfying fictional world with many Chinese historical and cultural aspects. Readers can still interact with the book through sound and limited animations. But since it is still a book, not a game, the role-playing experience is not anticipated by the readers, and they still need to go through the story, chapter by chapter, as in a normal

¹²³ Sanders, 26.

printed book. The interactivity enhances the immersive experience of the story but does not interfere with the book contents. With clickable buttons and hyperlinks, readers can also connect to external resources, where they can find more information about the historical facts or cultural aspects of the story. Instead of allowing the audience choices that alter the story, as in hypertext fiction, an illustrated e-book can limit the choices in visual assets, eliminating the risk of readers changing the story while still reflecting their diversity. Therefore, this medium can potentially answer the challenge of how interactivity and audience participation serve local authenticity instead of obscuring it.

Illustrated E-Books as a Transcultural Adaptation Medium of Asian Classics

Sissy Helff and Julie Woletz, in a discussion of the challenges of digital storytelling, suggest that digital storytelling ‘can exclude the generating of new stories, but include explicit means of influencing the telling of a given story’ (2009).¹²⁴ If one of the major goals of transcultural adaptation is cultural representation that honours the original text, it should not be lost in the medium chosen. While using a digital storytelling medium helps bring the classics to a global audience, authenticity and respect for the original text should be prioritised. Therefore, the storytellers need to have full control of the narrative content. Any interactive activities in the participatory modes should only affect the level of presentation. Interactivity should only be considered for communication and presentation, which in turn lead to specific interfaces and new

¹²⁴ Helff and Woletz, ‘Narrating Euro-African Life’, in *Story Circle*, 134.

relations between the author, the story and the users. However, the narrative contents are still predetermined by the storytellers. This can ensure that the readers have the interactivity they demand yet secure the storytellers' reference to the source text and its culture.

This strategy presents a practical solution for telling complex Asian classics such as *Journey to the West*, *Water Margin*, or *Mahabharata* in visuals. While their digital adaptations provide interactive engagement, narrative development is predetermined by the creator. Involvement of the readers, therefore, is limited to the presentation. Audiences can affect only the telling of the story, but not the story itself. In visual adaptations, this telling factor should be visually driven. Accordingly, readers are provided with visual assets with which to personalise their own presentation of the story, although the narrative content is fixed.

Another characteristic of digital books to consider is reading facility. Digital games are traditionally consumed in a specific space where the players are equipped with sound, consoles and even the internet. Digital books, on the other hand, require less facility, as they are often non-immersive, meant to be read on a flat screen. Readers might be able to discuss the book later in online platforms, but unlike games, they do not need to involve other readers while reading. With mobile devices, the reader or gamer can now play, read or interact with the story in various contexts that are not easily controlled or predicted. Users might be using their mobile devices with or without earphones. They might be using them at home in a quiet, private corner or on a busy bus. Therefore, a well-thought-out illustrated e-book for mobile phones should take these factors into consideration and present them all as options for the reader's

convenience and preference. For instance, sound can be added, but the story itself should still be enjoyable without sound. Interaction requires their attention and focus, but should not be too difficult to read on a bus. Clickable text and buttons can help readers connect to the internet to learn more about the story's background and traditions, but they should be self-explanatory in case readers do not have an internet connection at the time of reading or choose not to leave the app.

In addition, we cannot neglect the limitation of screen size. Mobile devices often give the audience a limited immersive space in which to navigate and interact through the story, which is similar to a small-sized illustrated book. Nevertheless, the digital industry always tries to match the size of the device with the virtual space that it can offer through the latest technologies with higher and higher resolution, which vary from a small smartphone to a large tablet. We can view illustrated e-books with confidence that the medium will soon receive the popularity it deserves and will be more widely welcomed by both storytellers and their digital audiences across cultures.

Figure 10: Screen sizes of digital reading devices vary from a large tablet to a small smartphone.

With the rapidly growing capacity and worldwide distribution of tools such as illustrated e-books, we might find potential solutions to the challenges of representing local traditions in a globalised context. As argued by Welsch and Robertson, the

opposing aspects of local and global in storytelling do not necessarily contradict each other. Instead, they can be seen as complementary in a ‘transcultural’ approach, in which ‘the adoption of global media development and for the expression of local identity’.¹²⁵

The above contextualisation and research aim suggest that illustrated e-books can be a practical approach to negotiate local vs global qualities in transcultural adaptations. In my research, this process is explored using the adaptation of *JTW* as the subject of the visual study. Within my own practice, the making of my adaptation explores whether transculturality can be achieved through digital storytelling, in particular, through illustrated e-books. In working with a local story, my research proposes a transcultural narrative approach. Through both theoretical discussion and practical experiment, the research tests how this transcultural approach may allow authors to engage with their culturally diverse audience. On one hand, the research also examines how certain parts of the narratives can be prebuilt to carry global appeal. On the other hand, the narratives need to leave gaps for interpretation from the multicultural audience to get them to participate. The audience then fills in the missing pieces of the puzzle to get the full picture of the story, which in return reflects their local identities. In order to archive these narrative requirements, the adaptation uses illustrated e-books as a medium that accommodates visual narrative and has interactive capability.

In the process of making this adaptation, my research negotiates how the local traditions of Chinese culture conveyed through *JTW* can be translated to the culturally diverse readership of digital storytelling.

¹²⁵ Welsch, 194–213.

2.4 *Journey to the West (JTW)* – Academic Significance

As presented earlier, *JTW* is one of the most prominent canon texts in Chinese literature. Written in the sixteenth century by Wu Cheng'en, it is a comic fantasy based on the pilgrimage of the monk Xuanzang (596–664), also known as Tripitaka, to India to collect Buddhist scriptures in a seventeen-year journey. Derived from the travelogue written by the monk himself and a biography of him written by his disciples, *JTW* underwent a long period of development through various forms of popular literature. In the novel, Xuanzang is accompanied by four disciples of superhuman ability. The first seven chapters of the novel tell of the first disciple Monkey King's birth and acquisition of magical powers. In *The Shorter Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature*, Victor Mair (2001) remarks that the seven chapters dealing with Monkey King's could well stand alone as 'an independent story cycle, but they are an essential underpinning for the rest of the novel'.¹²⁶

Zhang Jinlai, one of China's best-known actors for playing Monkey King on-screen,¹²⁷ claims in his recent autobiography *Xingzhe* (Traveller) that 'to know China, you should first get to know *Journey to the West*; to understand the Chinese people, you should first understand the Monkey King' (2016).¹²⁸

As a story of a Buddhist pilgrimage in nature, *JTW*'s main theme does not belong to any particular religion. To craft a story radically different from a synopsis of Buddhist

¹²⁶ Mair, *The Shorter Columbia Anthology*, 211–213.

¹²⁷ Sun, *Transforming Monkey*, University of Washington Press.

¹²⁸ Zhang, *Journey of the Monkey King*, Global Times, 20.

history, the author has apparently made extensive use of the idioms and terminologies of both the Taoist canon and an amorphous movement commonly known as Three Religions as One, or Three Teachings.¹²⁹ This movement began to flourish in medieval Song China and gained widespread adherence in late imperial times among official elites, merchants, clerics of different regions and the general populace. In Three Teachings, the widely disparate concepts and categories of traditional Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism were deliberately harmonised and unified. *JTW* reflects this cosmology and so did its successful adaptations.

As one of the world's most-adapted stories, *JTW* has been widely discussed in adaptation studies. There have been debates related to the question of fidelity, the negotiation between local and global, the convergence of art forms and the engagement between storytellers and audiences. In particular, there has been academic research conducted for a number of specific adaptations, such as Feng Yan's *Metamorphosis and Mediality: An Interart Approach to the Reception of Stephen Chow's A Chinese Odyssey in Mainland China* (2007)¹³⁰ and Belinda Kong's *Monkey Remnants: Paternity, Ancestry, and Chineseness in Patricia Chao's The Monkey King* (2011).¹³¹ However, most of these studies address specific themes negotiated in these particular adaptations, not adaptation study itself. For example, in *Reimagining the Monkey King in Comics: Gene Luen Yang's American Born Chinese*, Lan Dong explores the social taboo of

¹²⁹ Ebrey, and Gregory, *Religion and Society in T'ang and Sung China*, 313.

¹³⁰ Yan, 'Metamorphosis and Mediality', LEWI Working Paper Series no. 68.

¹³¹ Kong, 'Monkey Remnants', in *Myth and Violence in the Contemporary Female Text: New Cassandras*.

Chinese immigrant struggles in American society and how it relates to the American audience (2011).¹³² In *Metamorphosis and Mediality*, Feng Yan addresses the social context and reception of Stephen Chow's liberally adapted film. Despite the popularity of *JTW*, little research has been conducted on the story's relevance to the opposing aspects of local and global in transcultural adaptations.

To address the above concern through the case of *JTW* related to adaptation studies and digital storytelling, within my research framework, I choose not to look at the history of the original sixteenth-century text, but only at a number of visual media adaptations of the story from the 1940s to the present. While only two adaptations of the case studies are interactive games, the medium closest to my chosen digital book medium, all the chosen works are directly relevant to the negotiation of local traditions and global appeal. All of them were made for large, diverse audiences such as China, America or the internet. They are all visually based, ranging from films and animation to comics and interactive games. Selecting these adaptations for visual analysis, my research aims to examine the challenges of adapting classic literary works for visual narratives as well as telling local stories to multicultural audiences. Findings from these case studies help identify the different capacities these media adaptations provide for storytellers as well as their limitations. Furthermore, the content and visual development of my adaptation are based on my visual analysis of these works, in which I examine how they balance local traditions and global appeal.

¹³² Dong, 'Reimagining the Monkey King in Comics', in *The Oxford Handbook of Children's Literature*, 231–51.

Although the epic consists of one hundred chapters, with the main focus on the Buddhist pilgrim, the first seven chapters of the story are a stand-alone story of the Monkey King named Sun Wukong. Monkey's personal story serves as a prologue to the actual journey to the West; the pilgrimage happens later. The story explains his devotion and commitment to enduring all the hardship of the pilgrimage to fulfil his destiny and attain the enlightenment.

Considering the character's appeal, my adaptation only works with the first seven chapters of *JTW*. Focusing on Monkey as a non-human hero who is not bound to any particular tribe, my articulation of Monkey suggests that: although the story is well-rooted in Chinese traditions, this character might transcend cultural barriers. That universality makes his story in the first seven chapters of the novel suitable for my adaptation.

The Sixteenth-Century Novel and the Chosen English Translation

Among the many English translations and adaptations of *JTW*, I choose the unabridged English version by the notable Chinese scholar Anthony Yu for the following reasons. This version is considered the most complete, 'faithful' version of *JTW* in English, written by a Chinese scholar who was born in Hong Kong, grew up in China and studied and worked in the United States. In both versions, the unabridged *Journey to the West* (1952) and the abridged *The Monkey and the Monk* (2008), Yu draws on his expertise in Chinese studies as well as his cultural heritage to present the epic to a culturally diverse audience that may never have known about the story before. Eric Ziokowski states that this is 'the first complete translation, a labour of thirteen

years' (1977).¹³³ His unabridged version is also praised as 'one of the great ventures of our times in humanistic translation and publication'. Although written by a Chinese scholar, it was indented for Western readers and carries a relatable appeal for their multicultural readership. I believe Yu's expertise as a Chinese scholar proves the version's respect for the story's heritage. At the same time, its popularity in the West satisfies the cultural diversity of the readers.

The hero journey of Monkey can be seen in various Asian countries, including Vietnam and Japan. Scholars in many fields, such as literature, Eastern philosophy, religious studies, sociology and Chinese heritage, have examined this classic story as a lens for Chinese philosophy and cultural traditions. Francisca Cho Bantly, in her article *Buddhist Allegory in the Journey to the West*, describes the complexity of the text:

The bewildering array of cultural lore—especially from the three major religious traditions of China (Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism)—is so diverse and boldly interwoven that it almost appears as “simply furniture thrown in to impress, or mock, the reader”.”¹³⁴

Until now, the story has stood the test of time, bringing Chinese cultural traditions and heritage to other Asian countries and around the world. More than any other story from China, *Journey to the West* consists of cultural elements as well as universal themes to which audiences from other cultures can relate. Across a large number of adaptations, we are able to identify a few recurring factors that explain the story's global appeal, most of which lie in Monkey, the central character who transcends cultures.

¹³³ Ziokowski, Foreword, in *Journey to the West*, translated by Anthony C. Yu.

¹³⁴ Bantly, 'Buddhist Allegory in the Journey to the West', 512–24.

Monkey King – An Unusual Hero Who Transcends Cultural Barriers

Looking into the complexity of Monkey, my research proposes that Monkey of *JTW* combines traits of three archetypal characters in world mythology: the hero, the animal and the trickster. Scholars continually discuss why these three archetypes recur in many cultures and try to explain their universality. Thus, it is possible that putting him at the centre of the adaptation can help achieve the universal quality that appeals to a culturally diverse readership. One can suggest that the natural form of Monkey – neither entirely animal nor human – leads the audience to believe in his ability to transcend territory, space, and even time.

The concept of an archetype has been widely discussed among scholars. Carl Jung studied classic sources such as Cicero and Augustine to pioneer the discussion. Later on, Joseph Campbell defined the archetypes as patterns across cultures.¹³⁵ Jung believes the archetype supplies the insight of a universal perspective to what are universally experienced problems.¹³⁶

Campbell shares Jung's view of the hero archetype as 'eternal man-perfected, unspecific, universal man.'¹³⁷ C. W. Spinks (2002) calls the trickster figure 'a universal human construct' because trickster characters present 'the embracing of the paradox and contradiction that express human mentality'. In other words, 'the trickster figure is the

¹³⁵ Jung, Campbell and Hull, *The Portable Jung*, Penguin Books.

¹³⁶ Jung, *Four Archetypes*, 2.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 72.

enemy of cultural limitations and articulator of cultural boundaries'.¹³⁸ Harold Scheub even believes the hero lives inside the trickster, and this combination offers a universal moment in storytelling: the moment of rebirth. 'The trickster is the alpha and the omega of the movement, at once the force of the movement and its end. In the trickster is the hero, like a magnificent butterfly struggling to free itself of the cocoon'.¹³⁹

With attributes of all the above archetypes, Monkey, as an animal with the power of a demigod, transcends cultural boundaries. Consequently, audiences of all backgrounds can strongly identify with him and his journey. Monkey's universal appeal makes him suitable to be the core of an adaptation that deals with a culturally diverse readership.

Looking at the first seven chapters alone, however, we find a stand-alone story of a hero who is born from a stone, ignorant and unpolished, but who commits himself to self-cultivation and alchemy to become a powerful god. Transforming from an unknown monkey without a family, he finds a prosperous home for his tribe and finds himself a master of alchemy and a powerful immortal who rocks Heaven. In Monkey, we do not merely find a perfect, righteous hero who fights and dies for the right cause, as taught by Chinese Confucian values. Monkey's wild, childlike, untamed nature contrasts his unquestionable love for his tribe and home, pushing him beyond moral standards and making him more real, more human and more universal.

¹³⁸ Spinks, 'Duck Watch', 1.

¹³⁹ Scheub, *Trickster and Hero*, 3.

Monkey has both a hero's appeal and an animal's character. In the broadest terms, *anthropomorphism* is defined in Encyclopaedia Britannica as 'the attribution of human form or other human characteristics to any non-human object'.¹⁴⁰ Animal characters are assigned personalities as well as physical features to suit the needs of the narrative and, like puppets, portray different aspects of humanity. A human character serves as a mirror in which we see a reflection of ourselves and our story. An animal, in contrast, makes the image transparent, so we see a mock image of ourselves within and extending beyond stories similar to ours. With such capabilities, animal characters have strong potential to transcend cultures.

The use of anthropomorphism, in the case of Monkey, gives him the ability to transcend cultural barriers and convey universal human issues such as self-realisation, hope and the yearning for freedom. Therefore, Monkey and his story have the potential to negotiate with Chinese values and still relate to other cultures. Based on the popularity of past adaptations, the entertainment value of these chapters for a variety of audiences is proven. This part of the story also presents many cultural elements, a wide range of characters and rich spiritual themes concerning the negotiation between Chinese local traditions and the philosophies of Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism presented all together. Monkey and his story represent universal themes that are widely relatable across backgrounds, such as the human condition, existential questions and the yearning for self-understanding. Again, this connects closely to the research goals of dealing with both local traditions and universal appeal. Therefore, my adaptation does not work with

¹⁴⁰ Guthrie, 'Anthropomorphism', Britannica.com.

the entire story of *Journey to the West*, but is based only on the first seven chapters, which tell the personal story of Monkey.

Children's author Alison Boyle (2012) discusses why she writes stories with animals: 'Through them, you can make observations about the human condition, but the fictionalised place you create for those animals doesn't need to conform to all of our rules—that's where you can be playful as an author'.¹⁴¹

With no particular nationality or ethnicity, animal characters can relate to audiences despite cultural differences. Consequently, they provide storytellers with the freedom to touch upon aspects of the human condition that cross cultures, such as love, community bonding and self-realisation. In addition, animal caricatures can operate as metaphors that exceed cultures. In stories, animal characters can escape social judgement and do things human characters cannot. If *JTW* presented a human character who played tricks on the gods and turned Heaven upside down, he would be considered superficial, unrealistic and certainly unfit to be a hero. Yet, as we have seen, monkeys are often perceived as rude, wild, uncultivated and naughty creatures in nature, so a monkey character with similar attributes is completely acceptable.

While my adaptation is an illustrated e-book, my discussion needs to go beyond case studies of the same medium. Illustrated e-books are a new medium with a short history. Not only are notable *JTW* adaptations in this medium scarce, they also lack the aesthetic qualities found in adaptations of other visual media. Besides, there is a rich iconography of visualisation of the Monkey King in different media comics and

¹⁴¹ Clarke, 'Why Choose an Animal Character?' *Picture Book Den*, 2012, par. 3.

animation that must be examined in this context. Considering that the story and the character have been well adapted, it is worth paying attention to the paratext that these works have created. Therefore, I need to look into the historical framework as well as find my own novelty in retelling the story. In addition, as mentioned earlier, the emergence of new media does not erase the old, but challenges the limitations of the old. Therefore, experiments with illustrated e-books cannot neglect investigation of relevant visual storytelling media, including films, animation, picture books and comics as well as digital interactive games. This is particularly relevant in the context of convergence media, where storytelling is no longer bound to one single medium, but should be expandable across platforms.

2.5 Conclusion

The latest technologies in digital media have greatly influenced visual narratives, including introducing new ways of engaging readers in the storytelling process. Some would suggest that the most significant feature of digital storytelling technology is interactivity. While studies of digital interactivity focus on its capability to engage, my research is more concerned with its unique potential to suggest a subjective interpretation. This allows it to respect the diversity of the digital readership and, more significantly, to have an impact on the negotiation between local and global aspects of culturally rich stories such as *JTW*. The following chapter will more thoroughly examine the case studies introduced above to address the main research questions of what makes a good adaptation and how *JTW* as a local story can be adapted to a global audience using illustrated e-books as a transcultural medium.

Chapter 3

Reincarnations of Monkey in Visual Adaptations of *Journey to the West*

This chapter consists of four parts. First, it presents the selection criteria for chosen case studies and introduces the case studies' key information, including their contexts and content. Second, it presents the framework to analyse each case study. From there, the main discussion goes into each case study, its significance and shortcomings related to the main research questions and its challenges in making a new adaptation of *JTW*. The discussion aims to compare and contrast the case studies in order to extract the key knowledge for my adaptation as well as the pitfalls I need to avoid. More importantly, it discusses the relevance of the case studies to the question of fidelity to the original work and the negotiation between local traditions and universal appeal. Next, it turns to transculturality and examines how these visual media achieve the task of transcending cultural barriers. Last but not least, the discussion relates these examples to the context of interactivity in digital storytelling. Since they vary greatly in their relevance to the research questions as well as their accessible information, some will be analysed more thoroughly than others. In order to investigate them systematically, I group them based on their media to briefly introduce them one by one. Later, the discussion examines them more closely based on their relevance to the research questions. Finally, the conclusion of the chapter sums up the key information to incorporate when making my e-book adaptation of *JTW*.

3.1. Selection Criteria for Case Studies

JWT visual adaptations date back to early stage performances and comics. However, notable works with widespread popularity among large audiences exist only from the 1940s onwards. It is also worth mentioning that starting at this time, international awards helped bringing local visual adaptations to non-Chinese audiences. Giannalberto Bendazzi, in his book *Animation: A World History*, terms this period “The Birth of a Style,” noticing how the international influence and the age of television shaped the development of animation. Bendazzi notes that

in the Western world, the Hollywood or Hollywood-like animated short slowly died during the 1960s, but was ranked and then substituted by independent productions... At the same time, in the Eastern world, ideological/aesthetic pressure was relaxed, and animated shorts became open to stylistic research and a larger range of themes... This was the birth of auteur animation, which found its show window in specialized international festivals.¹⁴²

Bendazzi also remarks that the digital revolution brought new possibilities to animation and visual productions with the help of computer-generated imaging, leading to the genre convergence in visual media. ‘After the turn of the century, computer animation was a global form bridging genres, cultures and fields’. In particular, ‘the dream of making animation a complete aesthetic experience uniting all the arts and media is closer to reality’, together with the ability to ‘synthesize fantastic imagery, study dynamic phenomena from anywhere and combine it with digital recordings, all led to new forms of animation’.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Bendazzi, *Animation: A World History, Volume II*, 100.

¹⁴³ Bendazzi, 443.

Accordingly, to explore how *JTW* relates to adaptation studies and digital storytelling, within my research framework, I choose to overlook the history of the original sixteenth-century text in favour of selected visual media adaptations of the story from the 1940s to the present. The selection criteria for these adaptations firstly are concerned with the large spectatorship, the cultural diversity of their audiences. These criteria are based on the understanding of Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's discussion in *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the media* (2014). In the book, they emphasise on the importance of multiculturalism in negotiating the media spectatorship and suggest looking into cultural diversity of the media spectatorship: 'The culturally variegated nature of spectatorship derives from the diverse locations in which films are received, from the temporal gaps of seeing films in different historical moments, and from the conflictual subject-positionings and community affiliations of the spectators themselves.'¹⁴⁴

Thus, firstly, I look into visual adaptations of *JTW* that are either made in China for a Chinese audience but also relevant and accessible to other Asian countries, or made for Western audiences with limited knowledge of Chinese culture. However, even works created by Chinese-born artists that target non-Chinese audiences, such as Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese* or Ed Young's *Monkey King*, are good examples of how to balance local tradition and global appeal.

Secondly, the chosen works present the crucial need for visualisation. While animation, comics, picture books and games provide direct reference to my chosen

¹⁴⁴ Shohat and Stam. *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the media*, 347.

medium, the selected live-action films are notable for representing the Chinese traditions through production design and story development. There are many other live-action film adaptations of *JTW* produced in China and Hong Kong in the past few decades such as *The Cave of the Silken Web* (1967), *The Land of Many Perfumes* (1968), *Monkey Goes West* (1996), and the recent blockbusters *Journey to the West: Conquering the Demons* (2013) and its sequel *Journey to the West: The Demons Strike Back* (2017) directed by acclaimed directors Stephen Chow and Tsui Hark. However, these adaptations are either made from an episode of *JTW* or only use a few characters from the story to create a new story. These loose adaptations have their own merits, but do not focus on the hero Monkey King. Compared with these films, the CCTV series provides visual references for character design of the Heaven gods and the representations of fantasy characters in Chinese culture. *A Chinese Odyssey* presents a contemporary visualisation of the Monkey King that has never been done in previous adaptations.

In choosing a digital interactive book as the medium for the adaptation, my research examines a number of directly relevant adaptations of *JTW* in interactive books and games. These examples provide good insight into the use of interactivity in storytelling. However, the narrative structure for games differs from what I aim to achieve, which is largely to engage readers with the presentation of the narrative, not to alter the narrative itself. Therefore, I examine only two games. As explained earlier, digital books are still a relatively new medium with a history spanning less than fifty years. Also, because they inherit characteristics from other visual storytelling media, such as animation, sequential graphic art and picture books, the research requires an

interdisciplinary investigation into these related fields. Therefore, the case studies below are chosen from various media. Besides visual analysis, the research notes the way each adaptation approaches the fidelity factor and how the artistic stylisation can serve the negotiation between preserving the Chinese local traditions of *JTW* and the story's universal themes.

Adapting *JTW* as a digital book requires an investigation of past adaptations in animation, film, interactive media and illustrated books. The analysis examines how the fidelity factor varies in these works and how it contributes to successful presentation of a local tale to culturally diverse audiences. Therefore, the research examines nine selected works based on five visual media that are relevant to digital books, the intended medium for the research's adaptation: animation, live-action films, comics, digital books and interactive media.

The list of case studies is as follows:

- Animation
 1. *Princess Iron Fan* (1941):¹⁴⁵ Animated feature film, China. A liberal adaptation of a short sequence from *JTW*, this was the first Chinese animated feature film and was directed by Wan Laiming and his brothers.
 2. *Uproar in Heaven* (1964):¹⁴⁶ Animated feature film, China. Directed by Wan Laiming and produced by Wan and his three brothers, this film represents the golden age of Chinese animation.

¹⁴⁵ Wan and Wan, *Princess Iron Fan*, Shanghai Film Studio, China.

¹⁴⁶ Wan, *Uproar in Heaven*, Shanghai Film Studio, China.

3. *Monkey King: Hero is Back* (2015):¹⁴⁷ Feature-length animation, China. Directed by Tian Xiaopeng with influences from Hollywood blockbuster animations, this film was a financial success in China.
- Live-action films
 4. *Journey to the West* (1986):¹⁴⁸ TV series, China. The two seasons of this show were released in 1986 and 1999. Noted for its faithfulness to the original novel, this series is still considered a classic by many and has aired on local Chinese television stations more than two thousand times.
 5. *A Chinese Odyssey* (1995):¹⁴⁹ Feature film, Hong Kong. This two-part Hong Kong fantasy-comedy film produced by Stephen Chow is loosely based on the novel.
 - Comics
 6. *American Born Chinese* (2006):¹⁵⁰ Graphic novel, United States. Author Gene Luen Yang uses the legend of the Monkey King as a major metaphor throughout the book.
 - Picture book
 7. *Monkey King* (2001):¹⁵¹ Illustrated book, United States. This book is written and illustrated by Caldecott Medalist Ed Young. It is one of the best-known illustrated book adaptations of *JTW* in the West.
 - Digital media

¹⁴⁷ Tian, *Monkey King: Hero Is Back*, October Animation Studio, China.

¹⁴⁸ Yang, Xun and Ren, *Journey to the West*, CCTV, China.

¹⁴⁹ Lau, *A Chinese Odyssey*, San Bo, Mega Star and Media Asia, Hong Kong.

¹⁵⁰ Yang, *American Born Chinese*, First Second Books.

¹⁵¹ Young, *Monkey King*, HarperCollins Publishers.

8. *Monkey King HD* (2014):¹⁵² Digital game, Taiwan. This strategy game was developed by VstarGame for worldwide distribution, with in-app purchases and role-playing functions.
9. *Monkey King* (2014):¹⁵³ Interactive book and game, United States. These works were developed by Yahong Zhu based on the graphics of the renowned animated film *Uproar in Heaven* (1964).

Table 1: Selected case studies in chronological time order

Apparently, in all of these adaptations, there is an essential need for visualisation. In other words, their narratives are conveyed through visuals more than words, which is also the objective of this research's practical work. For instance, in Wan Laiming's *Uproar in Heaven*, the narrative strategy is linear and simple, but the visual construction is sophisticated. In this animation, Monkey's endearing character is not depicted through spoken narratives or conversations, but through elaborated character

¹⁵² VstarGame, *Monkey King HD*, 2014, video game.

¹⁵³ Zhu, *Monkey King*, 2014, Moshan, iPhone and iPad App.

movements. Observation of how visuals construct narratives is crucial to analysis of how visuals convey and transform the original text.

This observation gives way to the discussion of the fidelity factor and its role in presenting *JTW* to culturally diverse audiences. As the first main research question asks what defines a good adaptation and relates to the fidelity issue, one of the main selection criteria for these adaptations is the degree of fidelity to the novel. Some examples stay close to the original story and are successful for that reason. Others deviate greatly from the novel but are still considered successful. However, their objectives and achievements in visualisation vary greatly. On one end of the spectrum, we have an animated film that marks ‘the golden age of Chinese animation’,¹⁵⁴ and on the other end, a failed interactive book. Finally, the research considers generic variety, especially several recent works in digital media, such as games and interactive books.

As introduced earlier, there are a number of examples of digital games and interactive books, such as Gametec’s *Legend of Wukong* (1996), Ninja Theory’s adventure game *Enslaved: Odyssey to the West* (2010), Electro Source’s PlayStation game *Monkey Magic* (2000) and The Pinnacles Interactive’s recent interactive iPad book *The Monkey King* (2013). Although these media are also relevant to the adaptation, my research does not include these works for the following reasons: It is important that the interactive case studies are as close to my chosen medium as possible and are accessible using reading devices such as smartphones or tablets. More importantly, I looked for evidence of how interactivity is used to engage readers’ choices in the

¹⁵⁴ Lent and Ying, ‘Chinese Animation’, 19–40.

narratives. Although these works present unique contemporary visual styles, they are either made for particular game-playing platforms such as PlayStation, or in other cases, their interactivity does not engage the audience's involvement adequately when compared with the chosen case studies. For example, Pinnacle's *The Monkey King* has interactive buttons, sound effects and limited animation, but these are built into the book pages. Readers can play with these interactive elements, but cannot make any choices that allow them to become involved in the narrative. Therefore, I am aware of these works but chose not to include them as case studies.

Figure 11: Electro Source's PlayStation game *Monkey Magic* (2000).

Similar to the above examples, this game borrows very little from *JTW* but presents few cultural elements. Monkey, while appearing with gears and elements that clearly depict him as the main character of *JTW*, is no more than an avatar of the player when navigating through the game.

Figure 12: The Pinnacles Interactive's iPad book *The Monkey King* (2013).

Unlike the above games, this digital book is crafted with a realistic visual style and presents many cultural elements from *JTW*. It also consists of many interactive elements for readers to play with while reading the book. However, these interactive elements are not part of the narrative and serve only as gimmicks added to the visuals. The story can be read with or without these functions.

3.2 Approach to Case Studies Analysis

For each case study, I investigate the merits of the adaptation based on the relevance of its visual stylisation to its target audience.

Based on the dialogue between theory and practice, my investigation of the case studies is conducted through a framework of comparative visual analysis. This approach is drawn from Phillip Bell's guide in *Content Analysis of Visual Images* (2001), in which he describes visual content analysis as a 'systematic, observational method used for testing hypotheses about the ways in which the media represent people, events, situations, and so on...' ¹⁵⁵ Bell sums up the typical research questions addressed by content analysis, including questions of 'priority/salience of media content; questions of bias: comparative questions about the duration, frequency, priority or salience of representations of, say, political personalities, issues, policies or positive versus negative features of representation; and historical changes in modes of representation

¹⁵⁵ Bell, *The Handbook of Visual Analysis*, 14.

of, for example, gender, occupation, class or ethnically codified images in particular types of publications or television genres.’

Phillip Bell points out the significance of content analysis in allowing researchers to ‘make quantitative generalisations about visual and other forms of representation, on the basis of reliable classification and observation’.¹⁵⁶

In *The handbook of visual analysis*, Lister and Wells explain in more detail “the process of looking, analysing, and relating to a visual products as “processes of transformation taking place and also of struggle and contest over what they mean and how they are used.” To sum up, they give a check-list of the main features to look for in visual analysing a visual: the image’s social life and its history within the cycle of production, circulation and consumption, the specific material properties, the ‘medium’ and the technologies through which it is realised.

Based upon these suggestions, my comparative visual analysis of these works entails:

- The investigation of each work within its art history context and cultural heritage.
- The consideration of each work’s medium as well as generalised observations in response to the topical research questions, how it was realised and what elements of the productions can inform my art practice.
- The universality versus locality of the work: how the cultural roots of each work are balanced with the universality of the story.

¹⁵⁶ Bell, 34.

- Each work's originality in presenting a classic hero.

The visual analysis of some of the works most relevant to my chosen media is more in-depth than others, with specific tables to juxtapose their representations of Chinese traditions and contemporary references. Most of the chosen case studies present the negotiation of Chinese culture and global appeal in their own ways. However, I use the analysis tables only for a few prominent case studies that highlight the cultural roots of visual designs and are most relevant to the discussion of the artistic stylisation and to my chosen medium of illustrated e-books.

As mentioned earlier, digital books combines the visual narrative language of various media such as illustration, animation and interactive games. Therefore, understanding how each of these media is employed in telling the story of *JTW* in the chosen case studies is vital. In addition, the use of digital books requires a supporting discussion about convergence media, social context, cultural references, and audience reception, which relates to a few notable live-action film adaptations. Findings from these investigations establish the artistic development of a transcultural adaptation of *JTW*. Thus, my analysis requires unique sets of questions for each medium as follows:

- Animation
 1. What role does the visual language of animation play in the achievements of each adaptation, especially in the discussion of rather serious matters such as morality or politics?
 2. The chosen works are all produced by Chinese makers under Western influence. How does this affect the presentation of their films to a wider audience outside of China?
 3. Each adaptation takes a degree of liberty in retelling a well-known tale. How does the fidelity factor affect the adaptations' success?

4. Three films are made in three distinctively different times, hence their various artistic achievements. How successful are they in terms of presenting Chinese traditions? What elements of visual development are still relevant in today's context and what knowledge can be gained by adapting the novel again for global audiences?
- Live-action films
 5. Unlike the caricature of animation, live action films can render a fantasy animal character like Monkey as much more realistic. How does each film present Monkey through live actors? How does this factor make a godlike hero more real and human?
 6. Two films offer very different takes on the hero, with one closer to the novel than the other. How were they received in China, Hong Kong and other Asian countries? How does the fidelity factor affect the films' success in their countries of origin and beyond?
 - Comics
 7. The reviewed comics are popular in both America and the Western countries. How does the visual medium of comics affect the presentation of this local tale to a much wider audience?
 8. How is the Monkey King character received when committing a social taboo in *American Born Chinese* and how does it affect the book's success?
 9. What knowledge can this research reveal by examining the static sequential visual narratives in these two adaptations?
 - Picture book
 10. A picture book is the closest medium to this study's adaptation of *JTW*. However, these are primarily aimed at a specific age group, usually young children, while this research's adaptation is aimed at a much wider age range. What strengths of picture books can still be used to target both young children and adults?

11. The chosen adaptation is produced by a global publisher for children in Western countries. How does this intention show in the book's visual language?
 12. How was the book received? How successful is it in presenting a famous local tale to children of another culture who never knew the story?
- Digital media
 13. As the newest narrative medium of all those reviewed here, what new narrative impacts do digital media offer that can never be achieved with other media?
 14. Interactive books are still new and perhaps not yet well developed. The research suggests that the medium is not yet widely welcomed by audiences around the world, compared to digital games. Thus, instead of finding an adaptation of *JTW* in the genre, the research reviews two examples of interactive games, with one influenced by the 1964 animation *Uproar in Heaven* (reviewed in the animation genre). How well do these games present the story of *JTW* to a wide audience of anyone with internet access? How well are they received? What are their shortcomings and what can this research learn from them?

Besides the medium-specific points to be examined above, I also investigate the case studies in these three main areas: narrative strategies, negotiation between local and global and interactivity in the storytelling.

- Narrative strategies

In considering the format for the adaptation, the fundamental objective is to find a specific narrative approach that can engage readers. At the same time, the story should address cultural diversity in the readership within a universally appealing narrative structure. For instance, the narratives should be relevant to older children as well as mature readers. They should appeal to readers who have no background with *JTW*. At

the same time, readers who are familiar with the story and its characters should still be able to find new angles and a new reading experience in the book. In other words, the overall narrative structure can be linear, but the book can dedicate some space to interactive elements where readers are able to interact with the book.

The discussion of narrative strategies also involves narrative verisimilitude. Jerome Bruner in his article *Narrative, culture, and mind* addresses the importance of narrative verisimilitude and its relation to cultures that:

Narrative is rather an all-purpose vehicle. It not only shapes our ways of communicating with each other and our ways of experiencing the world, but it also gives form to what we imagine, to our sense of what is possible. With its aid, we pole vault beyond the presently expectable. And of course it shapes our conceptions of the past.

And it does all these things in a most permissive manner. For stories, unlike propositional accounts, are not exclusively hemmed in by the demands of verifiability. The test of a good story is its truthlikeness or verisimilitude, a much less demanding measuring stick. And even when we speak of “true stories,” we know somewhere down inside that we are using “true” in a metaphorical sense.¹⁵⁷

Culture, as he points out, defines our concepts of a good story, as stories, ‘unlike logical propositions, cannot be context free, cannot live in a vacuum. Even when a story is intended only as a fable, it is always located in a cultural setting, however “imagined” it may be.’

Thus, indeed, transcultural adaptations need to take into consideration of the cultural diverse of the readership. *JTW* is an epic story with many fantasy elements that are rooted in Chinese traditions but might be peculiar to readers without the knowledge. For example, the demons and gods in Hell that judge deceased souls are highly stylised

¹⁵⁷ Bruner, J., 2010. *Narrative, culture, and mind*, 46.

in past adaptations in order to make them fearful and represent death. However, their caricatures in my adaptation were considered for a culturally diverse readership and balanced with the narrative verisimilitude.

In addition, aiming at the contemporary readership, the adaptation also takes into account the narrative elements that might relate to the modern life. In the same article mentioned, Bruner mentioned that:

It is not simply that all of us, as it were, “live” in a culture and live mostly within its limits. There is another crucial matter that needs underlining. All cultures, however presumably “well structured,” are fraught with ambiguities and virtually irresolvable possibilities, notably so in the particulars of daily life. Life in culture is perpetually open to improvisation. And storymaking provides us with an exquisite instrument for taking into account (even for justifying) “real” life’s ambiguities and multiple demands. For narrative also provides us with the means of going beyond the culturally ordinary.¹⁵⁸

Thus, the making of my adaptation also suggests that part of the narrative verisimilitude of a story might lie in its capacity to reflect its contemporary angles which engage reader’s interpretation. That process involves the cultural diversity in the digital readership and requires the balance between global appeal and local heritage in the transcultural adaptations.

- Negotiation of local traditions vs global appeal

Although the chosen adaptations display varying degrees of reference to Chinese philosophy and culture, they all show evidence of negotiation in presenting a local story under the influence of what was perceived as universally appealing in their times. In many cases, this negotiation is most apparent in the visual style. Therefore, my

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

discussion includes visual analysis of elements used to highlight Chinese traditions in the case studies.

- Audience interaction

The short history of interactive storytelling has shown its effects on the young generations of today and tomorrow. Anastasia Salter remarks that today we are seeing ‘a generation is growing up with a convergence of reading and play in the earliest experience’.¹⁵⁹ To link the tradition of *JTW*’s visual adaptations with today’s demanding ‘digital native’¹⁶⁰ (2001) audience, my research explores interactivity and achievement in two digital games: *Monkey King HD* and *Monkey King*, both released in 2014.

With the above approach as guides, in the next section, my research enters a discussion of the chosen case studies, one by one. Each work will be examined according to its context, content, significance and shortcomings. The major points that relate to the main research questions are discussed as part of the significance and shortcomings of each work. In order to review them systematically and discuss their achievements in media and context, my analysis goes through them in the order of medium and time. They are also reviewed in the Chinese-specific market first and then in transcultural markets.

¹⁵⁹ Salter, 175.

¹⁶⁰ Prensky, ‘Digital Natives’, 1–6.

3.3 Visual Analysis of Case Studies

Animation

Within the genre of animation, my research looks into three notable animated film adaptations of *JTW*. They were all made by Chinese filmmakers with Chinese productions, but exhibit profound differences. These three films reflect three different contexts and carry different narrative styles that are influenced by their times. However, they also have many characteristics in common, such as evident influence by Hollywood animations of their times and visual representations of Chinese cultures. The visual analysis helped me identify achievements of these films that can be applied to my adaptation.

Princess Iron Fan (1941) – Feature Animated Film, China

Context. Around late 1930s, China went into a devastating war with Japan and was under the Japanese control until the end of World War II. In the context where the film industry showed notable decline, ‘the Wan brothers who had already long been established as pioneering animators in China saw Disney's *Snow White* in Shanghai were determined to produce something of a similarly high standard. The result was China's first feature-length animated film.’¹⁶¹ Despite its age and outdated graphic style, *Princess Iron Fan* remains one of the classic adaptations of *JTW* in China. The film is the very first animated feature film ever made in China, directed by Wan Laiming and

¹⁶¹ Lin, *Doubling the Duality*, 69.

his brothers.¹⁶² It took three years to complete *Princess Iron Fan* under the occupation of the Japanese army during the Sino-Japanese War. The content, therefore, is influenced by its historical context. In retelling a chapter in a story known to everyone in China, it represents a call for nationalism and unification during a time of hardship.

Content. Adapted from a chapter of *JTW*, the film focuses on one particular challenge that the Monkey King, Pigsy and Sandy, as disciples of the Tang monk Xuanzhang, have to overcome on their journey to obtain the scriptures. In this part of the story, the pilgrims' passage is blocked by a flame-engulfed mountain governed by a fiery demon and his wife. 'Flames can only be dampened by a mythical fan in the possession of a princess, but her son happens to have been killed by Monkey King in a previous incident, and she is in no mood to lend the pilgrims her legendary fan'.¹⁶³

In order to proceed with the journey and help the local villagers, Monkey and his fellowmen need to determine how to deal with this princess. Unlike a typical hero's story or many other *JTW* adaptations, Monkey is not the main saviour who comes and saves the day. Instead, he is partly the reason why the pilgrims and the villagers suffer. By killing her son, Monkey planted the seed of hatred in the powerful, cunning princess. As a result of his past actions, he and many others have to figure out how to resolve the challenge and carry on with their journey. Monkey, however, cannot do this alone. As a group, they help each other overcome the princess and the flames, and as the pilgrims

¹⁶² Lent and Xu 'China's Animation Beginnings: The Roles of the Wan Brothers and Others.' *Asian Cinema* 14, 56-69.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

continue with their journey at the end of the film, the villagers continue with their lives, now much more peaceful and prosperous without the flaming mountain.

Significance and shortcomings. It is worth noting two crucial details of the film. First, it opens with a pedagogical text: ‘Made with the purpose of training young minds, the filmmakers instruct young viewers that the film is a metaphor for keeping the faith and working together’. This statement obviously leads our attention to the film’s historical context and suggests its makers’ intentions.

Figure 13: *Princess Iron Fan* (1941) – Pedagogical text.

Another detail is the film’s resolution. As I mentioned earlier, unlike many adaptations of *JTW*, where the hero Monkey King often dominates the film and saves the day, *Princess Iron Fan* does not end with Monkey King saving the villagers. Instead, the villagers take responsibility for their own problem, adding a surprising twist to the film. These two points suggest that the film was meant to be propaganda, a call for unification of China during the Japanese invasion. Despite this sensitive message, the

film still passed the censorship test and was widely shown. This is perhaps due to the nature of animation, which allows space for caricature and seems to be intended purely as entertainment for young audiences.

Second, it is easy to notice that the film's visual style bears the clear influence of early Disney black and white animations such as *The Silly Symphonies*,¹⁶⁴ *Steamboat Willie*,¹⁶⁵ and other early Hollywood works such as *Popeye*¹⁶⁶ and *Betty Boop*.¹⁶⁷ The film also has a mixture of music from cartoons and the Beijing Opera, making it a hybrid of early Hollywood influence and local elements.

Amid the production and political challenges of its time, during the Japanese war, the film displays inevitable shortcomings, but also notable achievements.

Figure 14: Visuals from Popeye (left) and Betty Boop (right), series in the 1930s.

¹⁶⁴ Disney, Iwerks, Jackson and Gillett, *Silly Symphony*, Walt Disney Animation Studios, USA.

¹⁶⁵ Disney and Iwerks, *Steamboat Willie*, Walt Disney Animation Studios, USA.

¹⁶⁶ Popeye the Sailor is a cartoon character created by Elzie Crisler Segar. The character first appeared in the daily King Features comic strip *Thimble Theatre* on January 17, 1929, and Popeye became the strip's title in later years. Popeye has also appeared in theatrical and television animated cartoons.

¹⁶⁷ Betty Boop is an animated cartoon character created by Max Fleischer with help from animators including Grim Natwick. She originally appeared in the Talkartoon and Betty Boop film series, which were produced by Fleischer Studios and released by Paramount Pictures.

Figure 15: Stills from *Silly Symphony*, ‘Frolicking Fish’ (1930)¹⁶⁸ and ‘The China Plate’ (1931).¹⁶⁹

Figure 16: Stills from *Princess Iron Fan*.

The film’s graphic style is indeed outdated and has many shortcomings, but clearly shows both Western influence and the filmmakers’ attempt to reference Chinese culture.

Fabian Lin criticised the outdated visual style of the film by calling it ‘a curious - if not strange - mix of the Western style of caricature and traditional Chinese visual expression’.

To many extents, this is evident from the sound to the visuals. For example, Hollywood-style caricatures are mixed with traditional Beijing Opera dramatised acting; Monkey King’s character design is a combination of Beijing Opera makeup and the

¹⁶⁸ Disney and Gillett, ‘Frolicking Fish’, The Walt Disney Company, USA.

¹⁶⁹ Disney and Gillett, ‘The China Plate’, The Walt Disney Company, USA.

‘rubber hose’ limbs common in early Hollywood cartoons. Some of the character designs show influence of Chinese shadow puppet plays, while others resemble early Hollywood animated characters. ‘The character Pretty Face Fox is heavily influenced by Betty Boop, making her inconsistent from the rest of the female characters’.

Figure 17: Comparisons of the character Pretty Face Fox from *Princess Iron Fan* (left) and Betty Boop (right).

The soundtrack also reflects this Chinese–Western hybridisation. Buddhist music is ‘interestingly put side by side with sound effects common in Hollywood cartoons, yet the clumsy application of sound effects is a bit confusing. Another clear shortcoming is the awkward body actions. Rotoscoping – a method that traces frame-by-frame movements of live actors – is adopted, ‘yet the juxtaposition of caricaturised performance and the unrefined rotoscoping figures makes it an even clumsier work’.

That being said, even with an awkward mix of graphic styles and techniques, Hollywood influence and budget constraints, the Wan brothers still wove many representations of Chinese culture into the film beautifully with their unique storytelling style and sense of humour. For example, the scenes depicting Monkey King’s attempt to pass through the flaming mountain are still innovative and imaginative with extreme

foreshortening, in which the contrasting abstract background and foreground of the flames make the character appear to be swallowed by the fiery mountain.¹⁷⁰

Figure 18: Stills of the ‘Monkey flying through fire’ scene from *Princess Iron Fan*.

Despite the peculiar use of Beijing Opera and Buddhist music, the film strongly presents its makers’ attempt to introduce distinctive Chinese features. Although the film did not achieve the aesthetic blend of local traditions and global trends of the time, the aim to negotiate these two contrasting influences is evident. More importantly, this film should be considered as the first step taken by the Wan brothers and Shanghai Film Studio toward another adaptation of *JTW* twenty years later, a far more significant adaptation that became the best in Chinese animation history. Local traditions woven into the traditional designs present a good example of balancing global influence and local customs.

¹⁷⁰ Lin, 69–72.

***Uproar in Heaven* (1965) – Animated Feature Film, China**

Context. In the late 1940s, there is a significant addition to the Shanghai film studio. Bendazzi documented that by then, twenty two people, including Te Wei and the young intellectual Jin Shi, assembled in Changchun, Manchuria,

‘forming the core of what would later become the large Shanghai Studio. The following year, the animators were transferred to Shanghai and the team expanded to include painters, puppeteers, children’s writers and pioneer Wan Chaochen himself who, during 1946–48, had migrated to Hollywood and studied the equipment and the methods of American animation. In 1954, the other pioneers Wan Laiming and Wan Guchan, who had migrated to Hong Kong during the war, joined the Shanghai Studio, too. In 1956, the studios included 200 workers and, by the 1960s, had grown to include 380. The films were mainly for children. According to Jin Shi, the studio director, films had to be entertaining and educational while at the same time maintaining a national character. These points had already been made by the Wan brothers twenty years earlier.’

One of the studio’s tasks was to animate contemporary Chinese paintings that used traditional techniques. With a big and capable team, the Wan brothers revisit the epic *JTW* and produced another adaptation.

Wan Laiming’s second feature film is considered the ‘most challenging and prestigious work of post-war Chinese animation’.¹⁷¹ The first part was released in 1961, followed by the second part in 1964. The two parts span about two hours. The film is clearly made for Chinese audiences. This is evident in the oversimplified introduction of the hero, as the film assumes the audience already knows his background. Perhaps due to the deliberate removal of Monkey’s punishment and redemption at the end of the film, *Uproar in Heaven* presents a classic hero’s story with a happy ending, in which the hero returns to his people with a high prize stolen from the Heaven gods. On top of

¹⁷¹ Bendazzi, *Animation*, 89-90.

making another adaptation of a nationally beloved story, it is possible that the filmmakers, once again, through the caricature animation language, expressed a political angle in the extremely sensitive era of communist China, prior to the Cultural Revolution. During China's intense political atmosphere in the early 1960s, it would have been dangerous to make a film about a rebellious hero. However, Mao Zedong was a self-declared fan of *JTW*, and thus the film was deemed suitable to be featured and celebrated nationwide. Once again, like *Princess Iron Fan*, the film not only passed censorship but was highly praised and beloved. Perhaps this nationwide celebration is due to the character of Monkey, a hero, a rebel against authority, but still an animal. Despite the communist government's tight control over artistic content, the film's portrayal of an ignoble rebel fiercely defying the system of authority was still welcomed not only by the people, but also by the authorities.

Content. This time, they adapted the first seven chapters of *JTW*, the story of the Monkey King before he embarks on the pilgrimage. Here, the Monkey King takes possession of the pillar that supports the Sky in the palace of the Dragon King, and with it, he challenges the Jade Emperor. Once he has become a celestial mandarin, Monkey King faces attacks by the hundred thousand warriors of the Jade Emperor.¹⁷² While *Princess Iron Fan* presents several main characters whose interactions are the substance of the film, *Uproar in Heaven* focuses on Monkey as the hero who rebels against the Heaven gods, and at the end, celebrates his freedom from them. This is a rather remarkable point; as in the novel, the ending of Monkey's personal story is punishment

¹⁷² Adams, 'Aspects of Authority', 117.

for his pranks and entrapment under a giant mountain while he waits for redemption, setting the context for the actual pilgrimage in later chapters. Unlike many others who have adapted the first seven chapters, the Wan brothers completely remove this last part and end the film with Monkey returning merrily to his monkey tribe, celebrating freedom, fearlessness and authority.

Significance and shortcomings. Speaking of the film, Bendazzi in *Animation: A World History* remarks that Monkey King ‘personifies the human character, whose courage and shrewdness are superior to any strength’.¹⁷³ The film is memorable for its rich scene design and animation as well as for its vigour, but is marred by its slow rhythm. Its many sources include Buddhist frescoes and the popular images of the Beijing Opera. Shown at the Locarno Festival in 1965, *Uproar in Heaven* was also well received in the West.

Like *Princess Iron Fan*, the film betrays a significant influence by Disney’s animation techniques in background paintings, colour design and visual effects. However, *Uproar in Heaven* went far beyond the artistic achievements of *Princess Iron Fan* and achieved international recognition, marking the golden age of Chinese animation.¹⁷⁴ Shortly after its release, the film gained international recognition and put Chinese animation on the global map. However, made purely in China by Chinese filmmakers, the Wan brothers and the Shanghai Film Studio, *Uproar in Heaven* was perhaps never aimed at satisfying global audiences. One might suggest that this

¹⁷³ Bendazzi, 90.

¹⁷⁴ Lent and Ying, ‘Chinese Animation’, 19–40.

adaptation of one of the tales most familiar to the Chinese public was made as an artistic, nationalist statement during the unstable political scene of pre-Cultural Revolution China.

Figure 19: Depiction of fairies, immortals and court ladies in classical Chinese figure paintings.

Top: *The Immortal Procession*, Yongle Gong, Shanxi, China. Bottom: *Court Ladies with Flowered Headdresses* by Zhou Fang (ca. 730-800).

Figure 20: Stills from *Uproar in Heaven* (1964).

Departing from Western animation graphic styles, the film conveys an aesthetic statement by its maker. In a biography based on the filmmaker's dictation,¹⁷⁵ Wan Laiming claims that his love and obsession with the Monkey King stories began in childhood. In 1941, when he and his brother got the opportunity to produce Asia's first feature-length animation, they made *Princess Iron Fan*. However, as discussed earlier, the film did not adequately present his vision of Chinese animation. More than twenty years later, Wan resumed his pursuit of a truly Chinese animated masterpiece at the newly established Shanghai Animated Film Studio. The studio supported his view that a movement of ethnic-style Chinese animation was emerging. Te Wei, then the studio director, summed up this vision in what he called 'The Road to Minzu style' with 'the goal of adjusting the animated medium to the cultural specifics of the new Chinese

¹⁷⁵ Macdonald, *Animation in China*. Routledge.

national model'.¹⁷⁶ (2018). To the studio artists, the new style with strong Chinese characteristics was not only an aesthetic need but also a political task.

To establish Chinese authenticity, like what they did for *Princess Iron Fan*, the Wan brothers again employed sound and music heavily influenced by the Beijing Opera. Only this time, the influence leaned more towards acting, particularly in fighting scenes, and movement stylisation.

Despite these efforts, the heavy use of Beijing Opera music and influence which serves the artistic objectives of the film may not be relevant in a contemporary context. Such heavy reference from Chinese traditions in a modern adaptation may tie the work too closely to Chinese tradition and fall short of serving a multicultural audience. Instead, the heavy use of theatrical sound and movement should always be balanced with the narrative, and the audience's background should be considered.

In the background paintings and character designs as well, the film presents varying degrees of Chinese cultural elements that appeal not only to the Chinese, but also to culturally diverse audiences. In a 2014 article, Zhang Ping praises the film's use of colour design and environmental design to promote plot development. The use of colour in different scenes of *Uproar in Heaven* is a typical manifestation of subjective factors. According to Zhang, the contrasting colour palettes of Heaven and the secular world are notable, representing their respective symbolic colours in Chinese culture.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ Bobrowska, 'Seeking Truth in Facts', in *Global Animation Theory*, 61–81.

¹⁷⁷ Zhang, 'Analysis of 2D Animation Scene', in *Korea Contents Association Conference*, 325–26..

The use of national colour expression fills ‘the resplendent and magnificent heaven with mythical charm’. These artistic choices are rooted in Chinese culture and the symbolic meanings of colours, but also result in visually engaging sequences that can be enjoyed by audiences of any culture.

Figure 21: Detail of *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* by Chinese painter Huang Gongwang (1348-1350).¹⁷⁸

Figure 22: *Scholar by a Waterfall* by Ma Yuan, (1160–1225).¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Huang, *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*, Zhejiang Provincial Museum, Hangzhou.

¹⁷⁹ Ma, *Scholar by a Waterfall*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 23: *Outing to Zhang Gong's Grotto* by Shitao, (1642–1707).¹⁸⁰

Figure 24: Background designs from *Uproar in Heaven* (1965).

¹⁸⁰ Shitao, *Outing to Zhang Gong's Grotto*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 25: Character movements from *Uproar in Heaven* (1965).

The storyline of *Uproar in Heaven* is linear and simple, but the Chinese aesthetic makes the film's narrative language unique and culturally engaging. The table below highlights notable scenes that features how cultural elements are implemented in the film and their relevance to non-Chinese audiences.

Scene	Visual Images	Cultural Elements	Relevance in Chinese Culture	Visual impacts on Cross-cultural Audiences
1		<p>The film presents an elaborate sequence of Monkey going deep into the ocean, meeting the Dragon King of the East Sea and asking for a weapon.</p>	<p>The rendering style used to create special depth in this sequence shows the influence of Chinese brush painting, called sumi-e. The design of the palace and the characters which appear later bear a visual resemblance to Chinese monuments and mystic animal characters seen in Chinese temples and palaces.</p>	<p>This is a typical down-the-rabbit-hole sequence that can be seen in many Western fantasy films. In the hero's journey, this is the step of crossing the threshold, when the story and the audience follow the hero into another world with a more elaborate reality where the hero engages supernatural elements.</p>

2		<p>Monkey takes the staff and performs kung fu.</p>	<p>The action of Monkey's kung fu resembles those of performers on the stage of the Beijing Opera or Chinese street martial artists.</p>	<p>In the hero's journey, the staff becomes the hero's supernatural aid, giving him the self-confidence to fully act out his power.</p>
3		<p>God of the North Star</p>	<p>This character, as a peacemaker, is designed in all aspects as a Chinese god. His design resembles that of the deities seen in Chinese Taoist temples. The clouds on which he stands form a traditional</p>	<p>This meeting with the mentor takes Monkey from his earthly territory into Heaven. The God of the North Star also plays the role of a typical peacemaker, and his diplomatic and political manipulation affect</p>

			Chinese cloud pattern.	the actions of the hero.
4		Sequence of the Paradise world	This sequence includes many symbolic creatures in Chinese culture, such as white cranes, which represent longevity, and the qirin, a giant hybrid lion–dog which represents loyalty and protection.	The film takes the time to show the ethereal environment of Heaven, which fascinates Monkey and makes him want to be part of that world. The Chinese symbols make the scenes more mystical, delicate and surreal.
5		Monkey's mockery of the guards of Heaven's palace	These guards are among the few supporting characters in the film that resemble the popular figures seen in Chinese temples.	The powerful gods are contrasted with Monkey's comical mockery. Monkey plays the clown who is not intimidated by

			This particular guard is one of the gatekeepers of the gods.	the heavenly powers.
6		The fairies	These fairies are Chinese inspired and dress and act like court ladies in classic Chinese paintings. Their dresses also suggest that they represent the five elements in Chinese culture: fire, wood, metal, water and earth.	Visually, these fairies present a delicate, feminine beauty which balances the overwhelmingly masculine scenes of the palace, male court and emperor. Like fairies in any culture, they are close to and represent nature.

Table 2: Visual analysis of *Uproar in Heaven* (1964).

The staging strategy of the film, particularly the fighting scenes, inherit the visual appeal of the Beijing Opera, where the nature of the characters and what they represent are presented visually as soon as the characters appear. The

storytelling also resembles Beijing Opera's dualistic focus, in which the tension between the rebel Monkey and Heaven is depicted in both visuals and sound. With the clear intention of making Monkey the centre of attention, the film shows his dominance in many scenes by using bright red against blue backgrounds. More importantly, Monkey is always in dynamic movement, with fluid body actions compared to his rigid, authoritative opponents.

The above examples are only a few of the countless cultural elements that can be seen throughout the film. Accompanied by the use of traditional Chinese music to establish the narrative mood of each scene, these visual elements help construct the relationships among the hero Monkey, the surrounding environment and the other characters. In addition, these visual treatments translate the narrative content and invite the audience to explore the cultural aspects they represent.

With *Uproar in Heaven*, the Wan brothers and the Shanghai Film Studio set the standard for ethnically unique Chinese animation worthy of universal recognition. After winning numerous international awards, *Uproar in Heaven* became a classic film widely recognised as one of the best Chinese films ever made, whether animated or live-action.

Made during an eventful historical period, the animated film provided the filmmakers with a safe medium to discuss controversial subjects. Monkey's rebellious clash with the authorities in Heaven and subsequent welcome by the clamouring masses have inspired commentators to draw comparisons between Monkey King and various figures from Chinese history. With the timeless

character of the Monkey King, *Uproar in Heaven* is a manifesto for all those strong spirits that desire to stand out and make themselves heard.

After the Shanghai Studio closed in 1965, the filmmakers were sent to educational camps and the studio did not reopen until 1972. When government funding for the studio dropped dramatically in the early 1990s, the studio ceased to make similar productions. Since 2000, the narrative style of Chinese animated films has been closer to that of American and Japanese movies. However, to this day, *Uproar in Heaven* still inspires not only Chinese artists but also storytellers around the world to deliver powerful messages through local tales. It also stands as a powerful example of how to construct such tales for global audiences in respect of local traditions.

***Monkey King: Hero Is Back* (2015) – Animated Film, China**

Although taking much less reference from Chinese visual styles, the recent success of *Monkey King: Hero Is Back* also shows the attempt to reconcile Western influence and local traditions.

Context. Bendazzi remarks in *Animation: A World History* that from the 2000s to now, computer animation has been flourishing with creative potential. ‘The ability to take information from the physical world and translate it into a stream of numbers which a computer understands is now commonplace’.¹⁸¹ He also notes that in many Asian and

¹⁸¹ Bendazzi, 438.

Middle Eastern countries, such as India, Hong Kong, Indonesia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Turkey, ‘a frail animation industry contrasted with a prosperous live-action cinema. It became common practice for Western producers to commission labour-intensive tasks (such as animation, inbetweening and painting) to workers in the East’. In China after the Cultural Revolution, the animation industry almost collapsed. After lagging behind for several decades, China has worked hard to promote this industry, proving its films can deliver both unique aesthetic qualities and universal appeal. By the beginning of the 2010s, the Chinese government ‘threw their weight behind the industry’.¹⁸² Chinese studios became upscale, from basic character animation for television to development of computer games for the international market and full-length features. Singapore, India and Russia also began building up their infrastructure and expertise.

Today, China has the world’s largest animation industry, with an annual output of approximately 260,000 minutes every year. That is nearly twice the output of Japan, which has the second-largest animation industry (2013). However, only one third of these minutes make it to the screen.¹⁸³ Despite the vast number of recent film adaptations of *JTW* made in China, the story was presented again in 2015 in the animated feature film *Monkey King: Hero is Back*. With this adaptation, the filmmakers contribute to the recent efforts to change the image of domestic animated films.¹⁸⁴ It is worth noting that the film was made following accusations that Chinese-made films are merely attempts

¹⁸² Bendazzi, 442.

¹⁸³ Kalenyuk, ‘Animation Industry in China’, *The World of Chinese*.

¹⁸⁴ Bendazzi, 443.

to copy Pixar movies. Thus, the makers of the adaptation can be understood as desiring to change the impressions of local audiences as well as the world's view of Chinese animation. To do so would require a storyline that is novel yet familiar, a hero who can be relevant to today's audience yet is rooted in the local culture. *JTW* and the Monkey King are an excellent choice.

Figure 26: Left to right: poster of the Chinese-made film *The Autobots* (2015)¹⁸⁵ and poster of *Cars* (2006),¹⁸⁶ produced by Pixar.

Content. The film takes the bold step of rewriting this classic tale to produce a completely new story, retaining only the Monkey King as the major character and Pigsy as a supporting character. The story opens with a prologue closely adapted from the first seven chapters of *JTW*, with the Monkey King's uproar in Heaven and his entrapment

¹⁸⁵ Zhuo, *The Autobots*, Beijing G-point, China.

¹⁸⁶ Lasseter, *Cars*, Buena Vista Pictures, China.

under the mountain. Later, the main storyline begins in a small village with a young boy who is obsessed with the mythical Monkey King. Since his village is often attacked by demons, he longs for a powerful hero such as the Monkey King, who he believes can bring peace to the people.

Later, during a trip to the mountain, he becomes lost and accidentally releases the spellbound Monkey King from under the mountain. The famous hero, however, is still chained by a spell and has no magical powers. Unlike what the little boy imagined him to be, Monkey King is bitter, short-tempered and self-absorbed, and has no concern for the villagers under the demon's attack. All he wants is to get back to his mountain and regain his power. Fate puts them on a journey together, and along the way, as the little boy gains more and more self-confidence, his soft, kind heart stirs empathy in the Monkey King. By helping each other rescue the village from demons, they both gain power, courage and love.

Significance and shortcomings. Speaking of 3D animation in the book mentioned earlier, Bendazzi claims it is more complicated to produce, but renders more realistic effects, 'giving perspective and volume to the characters'.¹⁸⁷ However, he also raises a challenge 3D animations face, that 'traditional cartoons commonly caricature life and are intended to be a distortion of reality, rather than a realistic rendition of existence. To introduce a dimensionally accurate and realistic representation to the fantasy world is to depart from that caricatural intention'. This challenge, as well as the filmmakers' effort to solve it, are evident in the film. In a discussion of the film's

¹⁸⁷ Bendazzi, 443.

production, the director claims, ‘We can’t afford the huge costs of Hollywood 3D animated films, so we have to find our own edge. The only way to compete with Hollywood is to find connect on a cultural and emotional level. I want to tell the story in a Chinese way, using our own philosophy and aesthetics to explain the world in our eyes’ (2015).¹⁸⁸

However, is the film as truly Chinese as he claims? Towards whom is it aimed? This question brings us to an article by Dong Lan that critiques the globally successful *Mulan* (1998) as a product of cultural imperialism. Discussing how the animated film applies a Disney approach to attract global audiences, she questions the film’s basic authenticity: is it a cultural adaptation rooted in Chinese tradition or a hybrid product packaged for an international market?¹⁸⁹

In the case of *Monkey King: Hero is Back*, the narrative is peppered with common tropes seen in Hollywood blockbusters: the comical child, cute or silly monsters and slapstick humour. These elements can be identified as part of the Westernisation process Asia is undergoing. The film’s dramatisation is built on the contrast and tension between two main characters: Liuer, a young boy monk; and Monkey King, who is awakened after five hundred years of imprisonment. They come from two different worlds, and one is pure, innocent and helpful, while the other is bitter and lost. The narrative highlights these contrasts, letting them balance each other. Liuer looks up to Monkey as the ideal hero and wants to see the larger world with him. He

¹⁸⁸ Shaohui, ‘New “Monkey King” Brings Hope’, Xinhua.

¹⁸⁹ Dong, 231–51.

lacks a family, but finds one in Monkey and Pigsy. Monkey King sees Liuer as the pure, innocent dimension of the world that he has lost. Eventually, they achieve a balance as Liuer teaches Monkey King to be a real hero through selfless acts. Only then, by facing his fears and protecting Liuer, is Monkey King released from his spell and returns as the real Monkey King.

This narrative structure resembles that of Pixar's *Up* (2006)¹⁹⁰ in the contrast between an old man and a boy. In *Up*, Carl – a grumpy old man – finds joy and the meaning of life, not by accomplishing his late wife's wish, but by protecting Russell, a young Boy Scout who accidentally goes with him on a trip to Paradise Falls. Throughout the film, Carl is a mentor, but at the end, it is the boy who teaches him selflessness and the spirit of a true adventurer. As the film ends, they find family in each other. The similarities between the characters of Carl and Monkey King and between Liuer and Russell are not difficult to see. Beyond *Up* (2006), this adult mentor–innocent child relationship can be seen in other Hollywood animation blockbusters, such as Pixar's *Monsters, Inc.* (2001),¹⁹¹ DreamWorks's *Kung Fu Panda* (2008)¹⁹² and Universal Pictures's *Despicable Me* (2010).¹⁹³ In these films, the protagonists form a contrasting pair from two opposite worlds. As the narrative unfolds, they try to come to a mutual understanding and help each other grow, and through their relationship, their two worlds meet in harmony. This structure creates a double hero's journey, in which both heroes

¹⁹⁰ Docter, Pete, *Up*, Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, USA.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, *Monsters, Inc.*, Buena Vista Pictures, USA.

¹⁹² Stevenson, and Osborne, *Kung Fu Panda*, Paramount Pictures, USA.

¹⁹³ Coffin, and Renaud, *Despicable Me*, Universal Pictures, USA.

attain personal growth as the worlds they represent merge into one through their bonding.

Tian claims that the visual style of *Monkey King: Hero is Back* was influenced by the Chinese approach of *Uproar in Heaven*, but an analysis of the film's narrative and visual designs suggests a different conclusion. While hints of Chinese elements are present in the film (e.g. travelling monks, local villages, the gods of Heaven), it is hard to distinguish the film from mainstream Hollywood productions, both in narrative and in visual treatment. Although Chinese-made, the film lacks the cultural charm prominent in Hollywood animations of Chinese stories, such as *Mulan* (1998)¹⁹⁴ and *Kung Fu Panda* (2008).

Figure 27: Character designs from Pixar's *Monsters, Inc.* (2001) and *Up* (2009).

¹⁹⁴ Cook, and Bancroft, *Mulan*, Buena Vista Pictures, USA.

Figure 28: Characters from *Monkey King: Hero is Back*.

At first glance, the film clearly bears strong influences from Hollywood-animated blockbusters, which is unsurprising in today's context of globalisation. However, the film is far from a Hollywood copycat. Considering its huge success in China and neighbouring countries, including Singapore, Taiwan and Vietnam, it is safe to say that the film has delighted Asian audiences already familiar with the Monkey King's story. To audiences new to *JTW*, the film offers a completely new story which does not require any knowledge of the original novel. This success is achieved by applying a Hollywood approach to local Chinese elements as shown in the table below.

Scene	Visual Images	Visual Elements	Relevance in Chinese Culture	Visual impacts on Cross-cultural Audiences
1		The opening sequence summarises how the Monkey King defeated all the gods of Heaven.	This introductory sequence covers the important points of first seven chapters of the original story. The visuals present a number of familiar gods and deities in Chinese Taoism, but the stylisation gives them a modern look and the warm colour palette establishes the	With strong visual links to highly stylised digital games, this sequence is full of action and summarises the background of Monkey King in less than five minutes. The use of dynamic angles, from extreme close-ups to extreme wide shots, helps depict the vast space where the battle takes place and the supernatural power the characters possess.

			mood of war and anger.	
2		<p>The story moves to present time of the film. The characters, humans and monsters, are presented until the Monkey King re-appears.</p>	<p>The context of ancient China is established visually through the characters' looks and costumes and the city background.</p>	<p>The strong opening sequence of the battle between the gods, expressed in highly stylised visuals inspired by Chinese elements, sets a high expectation for the rest of the film. However, the film then turns to a typical computer-generated (CG), 3D-animated look that has been mastered by Hollywood production and showcased more convincingly in digital games. The characters present a wide spectrum of personalities and visual shapes but do not achieve the stylisation and richness in cultural elements shown in the visuals of the opening sequence. Nor do the characters stand out in comparison to other CG 3D characters in both films and games.</p>

3		The White Dragon comes out of the sea.	This sequence features the most sacred creature in Chinese culture, the Dragon. He is clearly a Chinese dragon, from design to movement.	The appearance of this mystical creature shows an attempt to impress both the characters and the audience. The sequence creates amazing visual effects, with a strong visual contrast between the enormous dragon and the tiny characters.
4		Background designs	Whenever Chinese civilisation needs to be part of a scene, the visuals clearly present it through architectural design and supporting characters.	Although Chinese elements are present, they are not treated as a main visual focus. The town and village scenes do not highlight these cultural elements to the extent possible. Other outdoor scenes in the wilderness have a typical look overused in mainstream 3D animated films.

Table 3: Visual analysis of *Monkey King: Hero is Back* (2015). Both Eastern and Western influences are present in Tian Xieoping's film.

These details are a few examples of the filmmaker's attempt to mix unique Chinese elements with a mainstream 3D animation look. The restrained use of traditional Beijing Opera music plays an important role in delivering the cultural elements of the film. Although many may suggest that these cultural aspects could be investigated and highlighted more, the mainstream approach might be one reason for

the film's favourable reception among Chinese audiences, who are familiar with mainstream Hollywood animation and want to experience a Chinese product with the same look.

Monkey King: Hero is Back received mixed reviews for its oversaturated colour grading, overall plastic CG look and stiff character animation. However, it is still a notable achievement given the production budget of \$16 million. It had the clear ambition to make Chinese animation of a quality that matched the size of the market. To do so, the filmmakers made compromises to balance the aspects of mainstream animation which their local audiences enjoy. They presented the Chinese elements with a modern twist so that they could be enjoyed by audiences of any culture. Despite mixed reviews, the film's commercial success suggests many positive opportunities for the development of the Chinese animation creative industry.

Live-Action Films

After the success of early screen adaptations of *Journey to the West* in China such as *Princess Iron Fan* and *Uproar in Heaven*, the undeniable popularity of the story led to countless media adaptations across many Asian countries, especially ones with Chinese influence such as Japan, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Vietnam. Many of these adaptations not only won over the local audiences but also helped bring the story to the West. For instance, the story of *JTW* and the character Monkey was made popular among British viewers by the 1970s Japanese TV series *Monkey*.¹⁹⁵ However, among

¹⁹⁵ O'Brien, *Spooky Encounters*, Critical Vision.

the most popular adaptations of *Journey to the West* in Asia, the TV series of the same name produced in China in 1984 and the two-part Hong Kong comedy *A Chinese Odyssey* (1995) stand out as the two most notable examples. Not only do they wildly differ in fidelity to the original story, these films offer two completely different angles from which to view the character Monkey.

***Journey to the West* (1984) – TV Series, China**

Figure 29: Characters from CCTV's *Journey to the West* (1984).

Context. From the 1980s on, TV dramas in China were considered primarily as a means of modernisation and nation-building.¹⁹⁶ Therefore, after the mid 1980s, many epic drama adaptations of the Chinese classics promoted Chinese cultural heritage, including *Dream of the Red Chamber* (1987), *Journey to the West* (1986), *Water Margin* (1998) and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (1994).

Content. The television series is closely adapted from the classic novel in terms of narrative content and structure, covering the stand-alone story of the Monkey King's

¹⁹⁶ Wen, *Television and the Modernization Ideal*, Lexington Books.

uproar in Heaven and later pilgrimage to the West. The filmmakers' ambition to bring the Chinese classic to life is apparent in the impressive cast of traditional dancers, singers and Beijing Opera actors and in the numerous location shoots across China.

Significance and shortcomings. The series was first broadcast on CCTV in China on 1 October 1986 and became an instant success. Robert Andre LaFleur, in his book *China*, summarises the series' reception in China:

As it aired through 1987 and 1988, it achieved the highest viewer rating in Chinese television history, and is known to almost everyone in China - from the memorable theme music to the case of characters... The monkey king character (played by Liu Xiao Ling Tong) has become one of the most prominent in China today, a powerful example of an early-modern literary figure claiming a major role in a much later era. It has been replayed in syndication throughout China for two decades, and has spawned at least one sequel in 1996' (2010).

As Lafleur noted, a large part of this success comes from Zhang Jinlai (stage name Liu Xiao Ling Tong), 'whose performance brought the character of a rebellious, powerful and resourceful superhero who never dies and can always turn calamities into blessings to life vividly'.¹⁹⁷ In an interview in 2016, Zhang he told the *Global Times* that one of his greatest successes is connecting modern audiences with traditional Monkey Opera through his portrayal of Monkey (Ye 2016).¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ LaFleur, *China*, ABC-CLIO Interactive.

¹⁹⁸ Ye, 'Liu Xiao Ling Tong and Sun Wukong'.

Figure 30: Zhang Jinlai plays Monkey on stage

Figure 31: Zhang Jinlai (left) and his father both dressed as Monkey King on stage

Figure 32: Zhang Jinlai's performance of the Monkey King in the CCTV series.

Zhang's performance in the series is deeply rooted in his Chinese Opera training, from body movements to facial expression. Zhang's performance combines animal-like behaviour, strong human emotions and godlike martial arts movements, bringing to life a Monkey King who is godlike, yet still playful and entertaining as an animal character.

For all its success and reception over the decades across China, CCTV's impressive series of *Journey to the West* ostensibly deserves a profound number of studies and scholarly discussion within adaptation studies. However, while the film is often mentioned in English magazines and film blogs, the scholarly writings in English about the series are surprisingly limited. Other than the few books and magazines mentioned earlier, none of them discuss the film's relevance to adaptation studies.

One can suggest that this lack of research into the film may come from its length and lack of circulation in the Western world. The series is relatively long, with twenty-five episodes of fifty minutes each, in an attempt to cover the whole story of *JTW*. In addition, the ambitious attention to cultural details, while effective at constructing the massive world of *JTW*, may be too alien to a non-Asian audience. The film, intended for a Chinese audience, also takes for granted many elements that only Chinese or Chinese-influenced spectators would know. For example, hundreds of god characters with particular looks and personal backgrounds are never introduced thoroughly; therefore, any non-Chinese audience, even with the aid of English subtitles, will be lost when these characters appear. Many deeply rooted philosophical aspects of Chinese traditions are also not thoroughly discussed. This is understandable as the series was never intended to extend to the West and its approach works very well for its audience,. However, this lack of background information regarding the characters and Chinese cosmology may prove a hindrance for this particular series or any adaptation of *JTW* that aims to reach beyond Chinese and Chinese-influenced communities. Therefore, although the series is faithful to the original story of *JTW* and is considered one of the best classic adaptations of many generations to come, its success remains only in local communities and it lacks the universal appeal that other adaptations of *JTW* achieve.

Figure 33: Zhang Jinlai's expressions of Monkey in CCTV's series *Journey to the West*.

In spite of these disadvantages, one of the live-action film's key distinctions over the animated films discussed earlier is its emotional engagement with the character Monkey, played by real human actors. In both the series and the feature comedy, Monkey appears to be very human with real human issues. Played by excellent actors, Zhang Jinlai in the series and Stephen Chow in the feature comedy, live-action Monkeys lack the caricature of a trickster that can be accomplished so well in animation. However, their human portrayals are engaging with regard to emotional expression and therefore powerfully portray complex human emotional experiences such as regret, bitterness, loss, confusion and self-doubt.

***A Chinese Odyssey* (1994) – Feature Film, Hong Kong**

While CCTV's massive production presents a classic, undoubtedly respectful adaptation of *JTW*, many audiences consider the wildly liberal adaptation *A Chinese*

Odyssey one of the most notable adaptations, although it is well known only within Chinese and Chinese-influenced communities. Unlike the CCTV series, the film does not prioritise fidelity in adapting *JTW*. It requires little background knowledge from the audience because it is very loosely based on the original story.

Content. Another example of this Chinese-style adaptation of *JTW* is *A Chinese Odyssey* (1994), produced by the renowned Hong Kong actor and producer Stephen Chow.

The film combines a classic story and hero romance with slapstick humour, time travel, parody of Hong Kong movies, and other elements which ‘modernize/post-modernize the original novel’.¹⁹⁹

The first part starts with a reincarnation of Monkey as a bandit chieftain, Joker. He runs into immortals such as the evil Spider Woman and her more sympathetic sister Jing-Jing. Joker finds out that Jing-Jing had been cheated in love by the Monkey King but continues to have feelings for him. He finds himself falling for her. Meanwhile, her jealous sister, Spider Woman, proceeds to poison Jing-Jing and make it so that Joker will have to go back in time in order to save the woman he loves. This he proceeds to do with the aid of the Pandora’s Box. Although many of these attempts are played for laughs, there’s no mistaking Joker’s desperation to achieve his goal and his anguish each time he fails to do so.

A Chinese Odyssey Part Two: Cinderella continues Joker’s entanglement and love story with an elf who stole Buddha’s lamp wick. His past actions require him to

¹⁹⁹ Yan, *Metamorphosis and Mediality*, 5.

follow the redemption path of a pilgrim to the West. Therefore, at the end, he has to find a way to reconcile his feelings for Jing-Jing with his fate and redeem his past life actions.

Context. By the early 1990s, Stephen Chow's light comedies were already popular in Hong Kong and established his consistent, light-hearted folk hero image. Compared to his previous films, *A Chinese Odyssey* turned out to be a relatively sad comedy.

It is impossible to discuss any of Stephen Chow's particular movies without discussing him and the character pattern he portrays in all of his films. Compared with other famous Hong Kong directors, such as Wong Kar Wai or John Woo,

Stephen Chow might be less well known in the West, but his trademark mou-lie-tou (literally means 'nonsense') comedy" has been well-received in Hong Kong and China, especially by the young audience. With his career being most active during the transitional period before and after 1997—when Hong Kong was handed back to China—many film critics believe that we cannot look at Chow's movies without relation to the changing in social and political context.²⁰⁰

Hong Kong critic Chiu-hing Lee (2002) referred to the parody in Chow's movies as a means of 'hijacking' the construction of one's identity and Stephen Chow is 'himself a microcosm of Hong Kong people'.²⁰¹

He divides his development into four stages. First, Chow was someone with neither power nor responsibility, which reflects Hong Kong people's sense of detachment in the early transitional period beginning in 1984. Second, by 1990, his nonsensical talk represented the voice of the powerless, especially after the Tianmen Square incident of 1989. Because people lacked the language to express their feelings of anxiety and helplessness, they then picked up the fragmented ideas offered them in the movies to help voice their feelings as a way of release. Third, around 1995, two years before the handover, a sense of destiny

²⁰⁰ Yu, 'Camp pleasure in an era of Chinese Blockbusters: Internet reception of Hero in mainland China', in *Global Chinese Cinema*, 161-177.

²⁰¹ Lee, *Hong Kong Postmodern*, 86.

was looming large, hence a shift from the happy-guy image in Chow's earlier movies to a melancholy mood as in *A Chinese Odyssey*.²⁰²

Figure 34: Stills from *A Chinese Odyssey*.

Significance and shortcomings. *A Chinese Odyssey* not only enjoyed initial box office success but shortly after its release, it gained popularity across Asia. The film has also been discussed much more widely in scholarly discussions outside of China. This is perhaps due to the contemporary issues and characteristics that the film reflects, which relate directly to the social context of Hong Kong at an eventful time, before it was

²⁰²Lee, *Hong Kong Postmodern*, 42.

restored to China. The hero, therefore, is not the typically mythical Monkey King one might expect in an adaptation of *JTW*. Instead, he resembles a modern man, lost and confused, with dilemmas and inner conflicts. This brings him much closer to contemporary audiences, which was the film's aim.

Figure 35: Chow's portrayal of Monkey in *A Chinese Odyssey*.

British film critic Daniel O'Brien comments that the film 'played mostly for laughs, Chinese Odyssey is hard to follow, as much for the humour will baffle non-Chinese audiences'.²⁰³ That remark is understandable, since the film was made as a parody and takes for granted that its audience is familiar with the story of *Journey to the West*. Although not particularly appealing to non-Chinese audiences, to Hong Kong and mainland Chinese viewers, this voice-over in particular and the film's language in general became popular in Hong Kong and China due to its nonsensical mood mixed with cynicism and romance.

Figure 36: Stephen Chow and Annette Chu portraying romance in *A Chinese Odyssey*.

Using only a few characters from the original story, the film offers a totally new story of Monkey in a new incarnation, a foolish desert bandit. Most importantly, he is

²⁰³ O'Brien, 152.

rendered as neither the “Great Sage” nor the arrogant, godlike animal of many previous adaptations, but as a relatively sad, regretful, confused hero – a loser in many ways. Thus, despite the slapstick and nonsense, the film offers a very intimate, touching image of Monkey. Speaking of the show’s silliness, Mengyang Cui commented that

this ‘unreasonable’ characteristic could be seen as the sediment of Hong Kong people's collective features: being subversive, unsteady, irrational, etc., which he has fully revealed in his films. Furthermore, this film style also represented Hong Kong people's social life, living attitude, preferences, and confusions, as well.²⁰⁴

As a wildly liberal adaptation with only a few character roots borrowed from the original work, the film can still be enjoyed by someone unfamiliar with *JTW*. One might suggest that audiences without background knowledge of the original work might enjoy the film more thoroughly, for they would not be distracted by the fidelity factor of the film to the original work and can watch it on its own merit. However, I would argue that background knowledge of the characters, no matter how liberally they are adapted in the film, helps tremendously. Without this knowledge, which seems to be taken for granted in the film, audiences will not find humour in the parody of the original work.

Perhaps the film never aimed to negotiate the local traditions of *JTW* and the modern, universal appeal to audiences of other cultures, hence the lack of character background introduction. However, the film does succeed at entertaining modern audiences with its humour and relevance to the contemporary social context. The characters’ complexity does transcend the classic tale to achieve relevance in the modern day, and even without background information about the characters or the original work,

²⁰⁴ Cui, *Hong Kong Cinema*, 29.

the film is still relatable to modern audiences with disparate cultural backgrounds. However, within the two hours allocated for each part of the film, extensive background information – not only about the characters but also the Chinese cosmology – might be too much to take in for those unfamiliar with the culture. On top of that, the storyline includes many flashbacks and sub-stories, which build up the character's complexity but can be confusing and might appear awkward to those unfamiliar with Stephen Chow's particular style of comedy.

A Chinese Odyssey's liberty in adapting *JTW* makes the classic myth more relevant to a modern audience. However, liberal adaptations such as this one may be extremely popular with local audiences while alienating audiences of other cultures. Should local stories be told only in simple narrative strategies, with a clear introduction to the cultural background, in order to achieve both local and global appeal? Certainly, this can assist any audience that is unfamiliar with the stories. But how will the local audience react? In staying faithful to the original work, how much novelty can new adaptations contribute to the tradition of the story? Those questions bring us back to the discussion of transculturality and the new media.

With respect to transculturality and the shift in cultural identities, Wolfgang Welsch argues that transculturality 'sketches a different picture of the relationship between cultures. Not one of isolation and of conflict, but one of entanglement, intermixing and commonness. It promotes not separation, but exchange and interaction'.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ Welsch, 194–213.

Therefore, transcultural adaptations of Asian classics are not necessarily presentations of particular cultures, but rather a space to connect unique Asian cultures to the universalities that can be found in these stories.

In light of Welsch's argument, we can look at another adaptation of *JTW*, the 2006 comic *American Born Chinese* by Gene Yang. Made by a Chinese-born artist for modern American readers, the book is a good example of an adaptation that transcends cultural barriers. Not only does it present its Chinese cultural roots, it brings a local story to a culturally diverse audience who are oblivious to the story's tradition.

Comics

***American Born Chinese* (2006) – Graphic Novel, United States**

Context. The global success of *Uproar in Heaven* (1964) was followed by that of other *JTW*-inspired works in other Asian countries, such as the Japanese manga series *Dragon Ball* (1984–1995)²⁰⁶ and *The Forbidden Kingdom* (2008),²⁰⁷ a Chinese-American martial arts fantasy-adventure film featuring Jet Li as the Monkey King. The story of *JTW* thus spread to the West and gained popularity. In 2006, comic artist Gene Luen Yang, a Chinese immigrant to the United States, again presented the story to the public in his adaptation *American Born Chinese*.

Content. *American Born Chinese* is comprised of three seemingly separate yet parallel plotlines that are intertwined. The first story is a retelling of the immensely

²⁰⁶ Toriyama, *Dragon Ball*, Shueisha.

²⁰⁷ Minkoff, *The Forbidden Kingdom*, Lionsgate, USA.

popular legend of the Monkey King. This story features the Monkey King in the fantasy world of gods and demons, while the other two are set in the modern world and describe the experience of being an immigrant in the United States on a personal level. The story of the Monkey King provides the context for the other two sub-stories.

It tells the story how Monkey is laughed at by heavenly creatures upon attempting to enter a party for deities. After being told that as he is just a monkey and not permitted to enter, Monkey rages against the injustice and attacks the guard and all of the deities in attendance. He returns to his home and engages in advanced Kung Fu in order to make himself not only more powerful but different. He emerges in the shape of a man rather than in the shape of a monkey and terrorises those who mocked him. The other deities complain to the emissaries of Tze-Yo-Tzuh, the creator of all things, who tries to counsel the Monkey King to accept his identity as a monkey, which he has abandoned. When he refuses, the Monkey King is imprisoned under a mountain of stone for five hundred years until the monk Wong Lai-Tsao shows up to enlist the Monkey King as a disciple who serves the monk on his quest.²⁰⁸

Significance and shortcomings: Published in 2006, Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese* was the first graphic novel to be nominated for a National Book Award and the first graphic novel to win the American Library Association's Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature. With roots in both Asian and American popular culture, and touching on familiar themes of Asian American literature, the graphic novel's critical acclaim and commercial success make it arguably one of the most important Asian American works of the past decade and an exemplary text for literary analysis.

In the introduction of the comic's revised version, Fu Binbin remarks that Yang used the Monkey King as both a metaphor and a transcultural medium. Fu notes that 'the legendary trickster figure has been repeatedly reimagined by Chinese American

²⁰⁸ Dong, 231–51.

writers as a source of cultural strength, a symbol of subversion and resistance, and a metaphor for cross-cultural and interracial negotiation'. In reworking this Chinese classic for American readers, Yang presents Monkey King as 'a powerful alternative image to the likes of Superman, Batman, and Spider-Man', along with other 'white superheroes who dominate the world of comics'.²⁰⁹

American Born Chinese is targeted towards a culturally diverse American audience. Therefore, the book successfully negotiates the seemingly contrasting sources of reference: a classic Chinese story with a classic hero and modern American culture. On the one hand, the book's content highlights the Chinese concepts of cultural roots, identity, community and Taoist cosmology. On the other, Yang substantially references modern American pop culture.

My discussion of *American Born Chinese* will bypass ethnic studies and how Yang uses details in the book as 'attempts to transform the limited field of Asian American representation in United States popular culture'.²¹⁰ However, surveying his references to contemporary issues proves the book's relevance to the modern audience and transcultural appeal. For example, Yang references the recent portrayal of stereotypical Asian Americans by 2004 *American Idol* contestant William Hung. In the comics, Yang parodies him in Chin-Kee's performance of Ricky Martin's pop song 'She Bangs' atop a table in the school library to humiliate Jin/Danny. William Hung, who became famous for embodying stereotypes of Asian Americans as both perpetual

²⁰⁹ Fu, 'Review of American Born Chinese', in *Coloring America*, 274–76.

²¹⁰ Cong-Huyen, and Hong, 'Teaching Asian American Graphic Narratives', in *Teaching Comics and Graphic Narratives*, 80–93.

foreigners and the model minority, is just one figure in ‘a racially biased, dehumanizing comic gallery of Asian Americans’¹⁹³ which includes Charlie Chan, Hop Sing in the popular television series *Bonanza* (1959–1973) and Long Duk Dong in John Hughes’s popular teen-comedy film *Sixteen Candles* (1984), to name a few.

Figure 37: American Idol contestant William Hung.

Figure 38: Page from *American Born Chinese* (2006).

Yang parodies American Idol contestant William Hung in Chin-Kee’s performance of Ricky Martin’s pop song ‘She Bangs’ atop a table in the school library to humiliate Jin/Danny.

Anne Cong-Huyen and Caroline Kyungah Hong note that Yang tackles

head-on complex questions of humour and satire for Asian Americans, as both objects and agents of humour, with the final image of the graphic novel, which is found inside the back cover, outside the main narrative structure. The image is an illusion to the Back Dorm Boys, two Chinese art school students, Wei Wei and Huang Yixin, who became international YouTube sensations in 2005 with their hilarious lip-synced performances of the Backstreet Boys' pop ballads 'As Long as You Love Me' and 'I Want It That Way'.²¹¹

Yang references the duo in Jin and Wei-Chen in the final image of the book. Any modern reader with knowledge of this pop-culture phenomenon will relate directly to the book, although this detail does not interfere with the content. In other words, the modern touches and references add more meaning and charm to the story without taking away from representations of Chinese tradition or thematic content.

Figure 39: Back Dorm Boys (left), and the parody from *American Born Chinese*

Besides such references to modern pop culture, the visual narrative of the book shares the humour of contemporary comics, which makes the adaptation relatable and, in many ways, entertaining to present-day audiences. However, these details do not

²¹¹ Cong-Huyen, and Hong, 'Teaching Asian-American Graphic Narratives', 80–93.

contradict the presentation of Chinese roots throughout the book, most notably in the Monkey King's story. Instead, most of them are nicely woven into the relevant contemporary context. The book is driven primarily by its visuals. Therefore, Yang's negotiation between Chinese details and modern American society is also presented most prominently through visuals. The table below gives a few examples of how Chinese elements are implemented and presented in the book.

Scene	Visual Images	Cultural Elements	Relevance in Chinese Culture	Visual impacts on Cross-cultural Audiences
1		The Heaven gods gather for a dinner party.	These gods are not directly related to particular gods or deities but give the impression of court banquets in Chinese palaces.	The chaos and intensity of the scene create a context similar to that of a modern-day club or party.
2		Monkey flies up to Heaven to join the party.	The palace and the characters show Chinese influences although the context is very modern.	This scene reminds readers of a typical American club, where people have to queue to enter.

3		A guard in Heaven stops Monkey from entering the party because he has no shoes.	Again, the characters costumes and facial features present Chinese references but suggest a contemporary setting and situation.	This first poignant moment in the narrative suggests a modern social situation: a young ethnic immigrant is not allowed to enter social circles simply because he is not ‘one of them’, resulting in feelings of shame, embarrassment and anger.
4		Monkey shows off his newly acquired skills to the gods.	These are highly popular Taoist gods in Chinese culture, with their own territories.	Monkey’s growth is visually shown, although his naïve effort to convince these gods still shows a young person’s struggle to find his place in a challenging society. He has to prove himself in one community after another but fails to impress simply due to where he comes from.

Table 4: Visual analysis of *American Born Chinese* (2006).

Yang's *American Born Chinese*, among all the chosen works, is perhaps the most successful compromise between the local traditions of *JTW* and the culturally diverse audience it targets. With *American Born Chinese*, Yang successfully presents *JTW* as a local tale whose hero's adventures serve as a metaphor for a complex transformational journey. Yang's work is relatable to American audiences as it employs the narrative language of comics. He leads us to 'rethink the implications of children's literature within the context of identity formation and transnational mythology'.²¹²

Picture Books

Monkey King (2001) – Children's Book, United States

Another work that was made in America, Ed Young's picture book *Monkey King*, also shows attempts to reconcile the Chinese background of the story with young modern American readers. However, this picture book shows less evidence of transcultural success than does Yang's comic. One reason could be the limitations in the readers. A picture book for second- or third-grade children cannot incorporate substantial cultural elements. Secondly, the length of a forty-page picture book cannot deliver more than a broad overview of an epic hero's story. As the picture book could easily be one of the readers' first contacts with the story of *JTW*, Ed Young's appealing visual style and over-simplified storytelling may serve only as a brief introduction to a well-known Chinese tale for young readers.

²¹² Dong, 245.

Context. Over the last two decades, the popularity of *JTW* has spread beyond China to the West, and the story has been introduced to young Western readers in numerous picture book adaptations. Most notably, the story has been brought to children in the United States in Caldecott Medallist Ed Young's adaptation *Monkey King* (2001). Young wrote as well as illustrated the forty-page book using minimalist collage-style graphics.

Content. Within the rather limited length of a children's book, Ed Young tries to narrate the story of the Monkey King's uproar in Heaven, the first seven chapters of the epic. Undoubtedly, the narrative content is over-simplified into major events presented in highly visual spreads.

Significance and shortcomings. Some scholars raise the questions of fidelity, authenticity and cultural representation in this adaptation, saying it lacks the essence of the original heritage. In their essay *China and Chinese as Mirrored in Multicultural Youth Literature*, Minjie Chen and Qiuying Wang (2014) criticise Ed Young's book, along with a few more notable picture books of Chinese folktales. In their view, it 'provides enough information to reveal how Chinese folktales are transformed into American children's literature, a disclosure of the complex cultural origins is questionable',²¹³ and it is hard to say that it truly represents its cultural origin. According to them, a faithful retelling 'can be undesirable for many reasons, one being that gatekeepers may perceive the ideology embedded in a story as a threat to the American value systems that thus reject the book'. This is a fair point; the story of *JTW*,

²¹³ Chen, and Wang, 'China and Chinese as Mirrored', in *Reading Development and Difficulties*, 243.

entertaining as well as educational in many ways, also contains violence and misbehaviour and is hard to tell without the use of strong language.

Figure 40: Ed Young's paper cut-out collage visual style in *Monkey King* (2001).

In the essay mentioned above, Minjie Chen and Qiuying Wang assert that Ed Young's book lacks respect for the Chinese roots of the story and question the presentation of its cultural origin. They conclude that 'the ultimate approach for combating cultural stereotyping is a choice so rich and diverse that no simplified, unbalanced, and prejudiced portrayal of a people can dominate knowledge about that cultural group'.²¹⁴

Although this is a fair remark, one cannot deny that Ed Young's visual direction for the book attempts to surmount the cultural barrier by going minimalistic with cut-out collage and leaving plenty of negative space. This can be regarded as evidence of his Chinese heritage and the inspiration Young claimed to find in Chinese painting. Publishers Weekly (2001) praised the book's visuals: 'His cut-paper compositions, in earthy shades of spice and sky, might be described as freestyle; pencil marks remain visible and shapes are imperfectly carved, requiring plenty of imagination. Young's dynamic artwork and his mercurial transitions between spreads mimic Monkey's own shape-shifting, making for deliciously unpredictable reading'.²¹⁵

It is hard to say that Young's adaptation of *JTW*, with its universal appeal, did not try to solve the question of 'combating cultural stereotyping' by leaving plenty of room for the audience's imagination and interpretation. That is a lot to achieve within a forty-page picture book for young Western readers. In many ways, the book does succeed in its negotiation between the rich heritage of an epic local tale and the universal

²¹⁴ Chen, and Wang, 'China and Chinese as Mirrored', 249.

²¹⁵ Publishers Weekly, *Monkey King*, 2001.

appeal that would endear it to audiences of another culture. Having been criticised in academic discussions for its simplification of a complex classic tale, still the book was well received by both readers and publishers and is still in print today. *Monkey King* is still one of the classic introductions of the story to Western young readers.

In reference to the varying degrees of transculturality in products, Wolfgang Welsch explains that diversity is inevitable, as ‘different groups or individuals which give shape to new transcultural patterns draw upon different sources for this purpose’. Drawing upon this remark, the negotiation between local traditions and culturally diverse audiences does not mean ‘uniformization’ but rather leads to another kind of respect for diversity: ‘the diversity of different cultures and life-forms, each arising from transcultural permeations’.

In this ongoing negotiation, transcultural permeations lead us to the participatory culture of digital storytelling, in which the audience is offered tools to express their diversity. Henry Jenkins notes that ‘the media of interactive storytelling demand participation. Perhaps more essentially, these media enable full participation through accessible tools and models for generating interactive works’.²¹⁶

Digital Media

The short history of interactive storytelling has shown its effects on the younger generations of today and tomorrow. Anastasia Salter remarks that today we are watching as ‘a generation is growing up with a convergence of reading and play in the earliest

²¹⁶ Jenkins, *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*, 3.

experience'.²¹⁷ Marc Prensky calls these young people 'digital natives',²¹⁸ people who are comfortable multitasking with digital technologies that the older generations, in theory, use less readily.

There have been several recent attempts to adapt the story as interactive children's books or games on digital platforms such as the Apple iPhone and iPad, Google apps and Android devices. Two such examples are *Monkey King HD* (2014), a strategy game developed by Taiwan-based VstarGame, and *Monkey King* (2014), an interactive book and game series created in America. Both are meant for global distribution. However, there has been very little scholarly discussion of the impact of these adaptations. The limited resource of gamers' reviews of these games on blogs and websites also reflects that the story of *JTW* has not been well adapted in this considerably new narrative form, compared to other media, such as film, comics or picture books. Is this because it is a relatively new form and not yet fully developed, or is it perhaps due to the particular culture of the story's origin? It is, after all, a local story, while games released for global distribution on the internet have a multicultural audience. Perhaps the particular cultural background of the story may require a base of knowledge for its readers to fully enjoy it, or perhaps these games have not successfully achieved the balance between the cultural background of *JTW* and the universal appeal that attracts a multicultural audience.

²¹⁷ Salter, 175.

²¹⁸ Prensky, 'Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants', 1–6.

Monkey King HD (2014) – Digital Game, Global

Content and context. *Monkey King HD* was developed by Taiwanese company VstarGame for Android and iOS platforms. Taking inspiration from the Chinese mythology, the game immerses players in the fantasy world with heroes from the story. They can unlock levels with new locations, battle scenes and characters. However, the game does not offer a concrete narrative, and the players therefore do not experience any emotional connection with the character of Monkey.

Significance and shortcomings. Stripping away the visual charm, with some foundation in Chinese/Asian visual styles, the game is a typical action-adventure game where the player can choose an avatar and progress to higher levels. Although the game does introduce many characters from *Journey to the West* as well as Chinese mythology and, with them, some cultural references, there is minimal introduction for each character. They differ from each other mainly due to their tricks, appearances, and specific powers in battle. Therefore, players without a Chinese background can definitely enjoy the game as a player but will not gain much understanding of these characters and what they represent. Monkey, after whom the game is named, is no more skilled than any other character and can be chosen as the player's avatar.

Monkey King HD by VstarGame promises its players an immersive experience with 'Hollywood frames, Xuanyuan Sword effects and IMAX FX' (VstarGame n.d.). Visually, it was advertised to offer cute 360-degree characters, with 'Japanese and Korean styles'.²¹⁹ Most importantly, the game promised 'interactive stories, full of fun

²¹⁹ VstarGame. *Monkey King HD*, Accessed November 11, 2015.

with online and offline activities'. Built using the high-end Unity3D engine with top visual quality, the game presents many visual effects. Rather than a concrete story, it offers a story-world with four races: Humans, Fairies, Buddhists and Sprites, all with unique characteristics. Players can acquire skills and level up by progressing through battles and locations, such as by climbing the Flaming Mountain or going through the Dragon Palace.

Overall, the graphic style of VstarGame's *Monkey King HD* is vibrant. All background designs are digital paintings with 3D representation. The characters are 3D animated, highly stylised, with big heads and small bodies. Some characters carry items that repeatedly appear in *JTW* adaptations. For example, Monkey has his iron staff, while Bodhisattva is dressed in white and carries holy water. Compared to other interactive games based on *JTW*, *Monkey King HD* has a distinctive graphic style and friendly user engagement. However, considering that it was made for mobile devices, the game's interface is often overly busy with many graphic elements, distracting players from the main action of the game. All elements are treated with the same vibrancy, which makes the layout busy, distracting and devoid of depth. A more muted background would make the scenery easier on the eyes, and the supportive elements around the frames should be hidden while playing to allow the characters to stand out more.

The game indeed visually presents Asian cultural elements. However, instead of showing a clear reference to the story's Chinese origin, the graphic style displays a set of cute, contemporary-looking characters with influence

from Japanese and Korean games. The animation, background designs and character costumes show only a few hints of generic Eastern Asian art styles.

Figure 41: Visual designs of *Monkey King HD* by VstarGame.

Released at almost the same time as the above game, *Monkey King* (2014) is another work that aims to bring the world of *JTW* into a video game and this time, in 2D, highly stylised visuals, as an iPad book and interactive game.

***Monkey King* (2014) – Digital Game, Global**

Content and context. The second digital media example was developed by Yahong Zhu based on the character designs of the well-known animated film *Uproar in Heaven* (1964). Unlike the previous game, this one borrows more elements from *JTW*.

Significance and shortcomings. By revamping the graphic style of a well-known adaptation, the maker loses the charm of the design, making the adaptation a mediocre commercial imitation of the film which does not stand out even among the very limited number of interactive book adaptations of the story.

Figure 42: Stills from *Uproar in Heaven* (1965).

Figure 43: Screenshots of the *Monkey King* adventure game.

To highlight the Chinese influence, the game makes substantial reference to *Uproar in Heaven*, but not by copying it directly. The game makers were indeed aware of the limited screen size available to them. Thus, the complex visual style of the film is simplified to fit mobile screen sizes. This results in a distinctive graphic style. However, it also takes away a lot of the visual charm of the animated film. The side-by-side comparison below shows how the main character of the game, although borrowed

from the film, has fewer expressive body movements and special expressions than in the original design. Scaling down the body and limbs through which most actions can be expressed results in a static, overly simplistic game that does not contribute to the rich legacy of *JTW* visual adaptations.

On the singular nature of visual storytelling on mobile devices, Anastasia Salter notices the element of ‘play’ and the convergence of all media in such devices: ‘As devices optimized for the consumption of content of all media forms, they place books, games, and films on the same playing field, accessed through the same interface. The touchscreen acts as a chameleon, imitating on-screen controls, keyboards, and even the filling of a page as appropriate to the content’.²²⁰ According to her, mobile devices, with their ‘new tools and models for interactive narrative and the increased accessibility of those tools have allowed for a broad range of storytellers to build on these emerging models for literary interaction’. Bryan Alexander describes such work as a ‘networked book’, suggesting a strong dependence on linking both within and without.²²¹ With the rich potential that mobile interactive games and books offer, these two games give players an entertaining and visually engaging experience. However, they do not exploit the medium’s potential for a more aesthetically and culturally rich adaptation of such a classic story.

The most obvious innovation of these interactive games, compared to other adaptations, is perhaps the nonlinear narrative structure that integrates player interaction

²²⁰ Salter, 157.

²²¹ Alexander, *The New Digital Storytelling*, 133.

in almost every detail. It is impossible to navigate through these games without the player's action. However, while both games carry a unique visual appeal, they lack clear narrative structures and character development. Therefore, both present their takes on the world of *JTW* in different ways, but bypass the story itself, as well as the complexity of the mythical heroes. Monkey is used in both examples only as an avatar of the player as he or she progresses through the story-world of the game. The player's interaction, while visually satisfying, is merely physical and lacks an emotional component.

This analysis of two interactive media adaptations proved particularly useful in the creation of my new illustrated e-book adaptation. Compared to the case studies of other media, their visual and narrative contents do not achieve the same sophistication and representation of cultural heritage. However, with the advantage of interactive media, these games do offer a unique, interactive experience that traditional media cannot. For example, they both provide an immersive space of user engagement that lets players become the hero and actively go through the journey inside the games. Nevertheless, the lack of character background and narrative development leads to a lack of emotional connection between the players and characters.

Using knowledge gained by observing the shortcomings as well as the achievements of these games, my adaptation chooses to engage the audience through sequential graphic storytelling with interactive elements. To accomplish this, the adaptation requires a narrative structure in which readers may empathise with the character, which leads to emotional engagement. Therefore, within the first seven chapters of Anthony Yu's unabridged version of *JTW*, my research chooses to adapt

only those story details that promote emotional engagement. The narrative content drives the visual development, and the visuals serve the narrative requirements.

3.4 Conclusion

All of the listed visual adaptations of *JTW* show the makers' attempts to bring a well-known classic tale to their contemporary audiences, with varying degrees of success. Some works display mastery in presenting the Chinese aesthetic eloquently using the language of animation and film, such as *Uproar in Heaven* and the CCTV series. Others try to bring the classic work closer to the contemporary context, such as *American Born Chinese* and *A Chinese Odyssey*. Interestingly, the earliest works in the list of case studies, such as *Uproar in Heaven* and the CCTV series, present the Chinese aesthetic masterfully. Recent works, particularly the interactive games, benefit from the latest technology in digital storytelling, but fall short in the cultural representation of their origin. Consideration of global audiences also varies from one work to another in storytelling aspects such as setting, characterisation, narrative structure, use of colour and sound and depictions of society. However, all of these works display a common effort to negotiate the balance between local traditions and international appeal in various ways. For instance, *Uproar in Heaven* and *Princess Iron Fan* are the two examples that deal with international influence from the Western animation industry, yet they find their own ways to represent the Chinese aesthetic. *American Born Chinese* retells the classic Chinese tale as part of a story about a Chinese American boy, using the story as a metaphor for the boy's cultural heritage. It does not follow the source text as closely as other adaptations, but finds a way to bring the universal appeal of

Hollywood blockbuster animations to a storyline that can excite the Chinese audience who knows the story as well as any unfamiliar audience. Although varied greatly from one to the next, the case studies prove one thing: first and foremost, a good adaptation has to stand on its own. Another truth that emerges is that while other traditional visual media – such as film, animation and comics – achieve a balance between local traditions and universal appeal, the new digital adaptations fall short in this respect. This, perhaps, is partly due to the challenge of bringing interactivity into the narrative.

It is also apparent that the aesthetics of the works range from traditional folk art to a more contemporary, global approach, but overall, the chosen theme and story are rooted in the background of the makers, which appears in the work. The relevance of these works to culturally diverse audiences, one may suggest, lies in the universalities of the central character Monkey. After many centuries, *JTW* has been adapted in the fine arts, on the stage and even in pop culture. Through these examples, it is evident that *JTW* is an ideal story for fusing Chinese culture, fantasy elements and settings with the universal themes of self-realisation and reconciliation, which can attract much larger audiences beyond the Chinese public. Therefore, the story of *JTW* and its hero lend themselves to a transcultural approach, which contemporary storytellers can use to negotiate cultures and national identities in the global community.

As mass media connects diverse cultures, storytellers understandably employ an increasingly international approach to allow their work to communicate with diverse audiences. Pop culture media proves to be a strong tool for communication between cultures. With the primary advantage of communicating with mass audiences, pop culture media makes local cultures more approachable to those from different historical

backgrounds and traditions. In this sense, pop culture media can be regarded as a globalising agent. In the particular case of *JTW* and its media adaptations, the story itself presents timeless themes and characters relevant to audiences of many cultures. At the same time, the storytelling language of animation and comics endows this classic local tale with global appeal.

The call for transcultural adaptations of classic tales is not simply an artistic or cultural quest, but also speaks to potential commercial value. In a comprehensive overview of the history of adventure games and illustrated e-books, Anastasia Salter noted that alongside these reinventions and convergences of familiar genres,

a crowded market of both converted and original picture books for the iPad has created a new marketplace. Most of these appear to be well-intentioned conversions of old texts to digitally enhanced versions, though at times the result seems designed more to turn the device into an engaging portable entertainment system than to extend the experience of the original text. Perhaps most important, the new format increases the cross-generational appeal that was already inherent in the content.²²²

National identities and local traditions represented by culture are the heart of any work of art, including pop culture media. For centuries, through art and visual cultures, local traditions, thoughts and ideas have been exchanged between nations, communities and peoples. In the age of globalisation, when an audience can vary from a single national group to the worldwide public of the internet, it is perhaps more important than ever for visual artists and storytellers to transcend local cultural elements in their work and bring their own cultures onto the global scene. Awareness of how these traditions fit into the universality of pop culture will introduce these artworks to wider audiences.

²²² Salter, 168.

As discussed above, the chosen case studies vary greatly in their faithfulness to the sixteenth-century novel as well as in their narrative strategies. However, these common patterns recur in each work:

- Monkey's background and popularity are often taken for granted.
- There is little background information about characters and events, so non-Chinese audiences may become lost.
- The dominant focus is often the character Monkey.
- The classic linear narrative structure, although lacking novelty, is often employed to construct the story-worlds.
- While most adaptations that use linear narrative focus on the events surrounding the hero Monkey, liberal adaptations choose to go into Monkey's inner world, where his struggles, complexity and contradictions resemble those of humans.
- The visual character designs of Monkey vary greatly from one adaptation to another and are considerably influenced by the contemporary visual styles of their times.

In the reviewed case studies, it is easy to distinguish between two categories of story systems: First, generic story systems that are defined by the makers (animation, comics, film), and second, storytelling systems that include reader interactivity (digital games). As Sissy Helff and Julie Woletz pointed out, the major narrative issue with the latter is deciding where to locate 'interactivity' in the context of computer-based stories, and how exactly the user's interactions affect a narrative. According to them, that is because there is a 'considerable difference between user involvement in story generating

or user involvement in storytelling'.²²³ In these works, the reader becomes a co-author by 'creating new stories out of given possibilities every time she or he "reads" the story'. As a hybrid narrative form of comics, animation and illustration with the integration of interactivity, my adaptation reflects my findings regarding both the artistic achievements of comics, picture books and animation and the shortcomings of interactive digital media. In other words, my adaptation was created based on the theoretical findings of the case studies' analysis. The achievements and shortcomings of these works help evaluate my adaptation's ability to negotiate between local and global story characteristics and its integration of interactivity into a systemic narrative.

To address the first challenge, my adaptation attempts to reconcile local traditions and global appeal, primarily through narrative choices and artistic methods rooted in both the knowledge gained from case studies and my own approach. In discussing the latter challenge, Marie-Laure Ryan suggested a practical solution: to generate new relations between the author and the readers.²²⁴ Thus, my adaptation incorporates interactivity into the presentation of the storytelling without letting user engagement interfere with the systemic narrative.

Exploring the above solution, the following chapter demonstrates my creative process of developing a new illustrated e-book adaptation of *JTW*. Employing the illustrated e-book as the medium, my practice answers these main research questions:

²²³ Helff, and Woletz, *Narrating Euro-African Life in Digital Space*, 133.

²²⁴ Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, Johns Hopkins University Press.

(1) How I can employ illustrated e-books as a medium to retell the story of *JTW* and (2)

How my creative process contributes to the understanding of visual adaptation.

Chapter 4

Practice-Led Research – The Making of

The Song of Stone Monkey

4.1 Introduction

As mentioned in chapter 1, Linda Candy defines practice-led Research PhD as ‘concerned with the nature of practice and leads to new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice. The main focus of the research is to advance knowledge about practice, or to advance knowledge within practice. In a doctoral thesis, the results of practice-led research may be fully described in text form without the inclusion of a creative outcome. The primary focus of the research is to advance knowledge about practice, or to advance knowledge within practice. Such research includes practice as an integral part of its method and often falls within the general area of action research. The doctoral theses that emerge from this type of practice related research are not the same as those that include artefacts and works as part of the submission.’ That is to distinguish it from Practice-based research, which is ‘an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice. Claims of originality and contribution to knowledge may be demonstrated through creative outcomes which may include artefacts such as images, music, designs, models, digital media or other outcomes such as performances and exhibitions Whilst the significance and context of the claims are described in words, a full understanding can only be obtained with direct reference to those outcomes. A practice-based PhD is

distinguishable from a conventional PhD because creative outcomes from the research process may be included in the submission for examination and the claim for an original contribution to the field are held to be demonstrated through the original creative work.²²⁵

Building on the theoretical findings, this chapter explains how the research goals are carried out practically, which makes up 25 percent of this research. At a glance, my new adaptation of *JTW* confronts two seemingly opposing requirements: the local traditions in transcultural adaptations and the universalities that can satisfy a multicultural readership. In fact, they are both parts of the same goal: an adaptation that transcends cultural barriers. Among all the media available for transcultural adaptation, the discussion in the previous chapters suggests that the medium of illustrated e-books is effective. In the globalisation context of transmedia franchises, independent authors still can approach global audiences to promote their cultural identities and local traditions through digital storytelling media. With its flexible and cost-effective production as well as its artistic potential, the medium of illustrated e-books is suitable for independent, local, small-scale enterprises. The theoretical discussion also examined *Journey to the West* as a Chinese classic with universal themes, which makes it a compelling story to adapt. In addition, the visual analysis of the case studies analysed selected visual adaptations of *JTW* to provide insight regarding both the narrative and the visual content. In this chapter, I reflect on the objectives discussed in the previous

²²⁵ Candy, "Practice based research: A guide," 1-19.

chapters, which inform the creation of my own adaptation of *JTW* as an illustrated e-book titled *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

Although illustrated e-books can serve any target audience, as a transcultural adaptation, *The Song of Stone Monkey* targets a family audience with cultural diversity. Its audiences, therefore, are those who have access to a mobile reading device and the internet. They understand English well and are familiar with basic navigation of a digital interactive book. In dealing with the family audience, I also share Leonard Maltin's view that it is difficult to divide the audience based on age groups. Instead, he proposes just two groups: young children and older children.²²⁶ Regarding the juvenile audience, I suggest that the book is more appropriate for older children (over the age of ten) who can read complex text and handle more sophisticated narrative material and are frequent users of digital media. The book was developed with this demographic in consideration. Specific objectives to address this audience's demands are discussed in later sections that examine the book's intergenerational appeal.

Throughout this chapter, my focus is not only to demonstrate the making of the book, but also the interdependencies between theory and practice, how research findings are applied in practice and how practice evaluates research findings in the feedback loop, as discussed in the methodology. The making of the adaptation is not only an application of the hypothesis from the case-studies, but also expands my knowledge and skills as in visual storytelling. The self-reflection process after the making of the adaptation evaluates the process and the hypothesis made during the case-studies

226 Maltin. *Leonard Maltin's 2009 Movie Guide*, v.

analysis. More importantly, it raises questions and concerns to the future of the practice. Most importantly, the adaptation generates more questions and discussions on the process of making cross-cultural adaptations of the local classics, which can be considered in my future research or by other researchers and practitioner in the relevant fields.

Throughout this chapter, I will also deeply engage with the discussion of Chinese philosophical concepts that are essential to *JTW*. Below is a brief introduction of these concepts. They will be further explained later within specific stages of the practical work development.

- **Three Teachings:** The Chinese philosophy of the Three Teachings consists of Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism. These three central beliefs have distinct Chinese historical roots. As they became more embedded across China, they shaped and influenced each other and were no longer exclusive. That means one person could practice Taoism, patronise Buddhist temples, and follow Confucian rituals.²²⁷ Peng Jin-Yuan's *Rites: the Ethical Intension of Chinese Traditional Architecture*, WY Wong's *Defining Chinese folk religion: A methodological interpretation*, Pierre Ostrowski and Gwen Penner's *Chinese temple etiquette*, Jonathan Chamberlain's *Chinese Gods: An Introduction to Chinese Folk Religion* mentioned these teachings and their advice for living in harmony with nature and respect to the gods.
- **The Tao:** Taoists refer to the nature of all things that permeates all beings as the Tao. This concept is famously described in the opening lines of the *Tao Te*

²²⁷ Ebrey, and Gregory, 313.

Ching, a fundamental Taoist text written around the sixth century BC: ‘The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal name. The Tao is both named and nameless. As nameless it is the origin of all things; as named it is the Mother of 10,000 things’.²²⁸

- **Buddha:** In *What the Buddha Taught*, Rāhula explains that Buddha can mean Gautama the Buddha, the Indian prince who founded Buddhism, but it also means the ‘Enlightened One’, the pure goodness in every being. In my adaptation as well as in the discussion of its creative process, I always refer to Buddha in the second sense, the ‘enlightened one’.²²⁹

Besides the concepts related to Chinese philosophy, the following description explains the specific steps in the development of my adaptation. As introduced in the previous chapters, my chosen medium of illustrated e-books involves related sequential graphic storytelling media such as animation, picture books, comics, film and interactive games. Thus, the creative process of my adaptation references all of the above media. The terms used in the discussion, therefore, also relate to the production of animation, comics and picture books. In particular, the animation production process that consists of screenwriting, storyboarding, production design, character design and background painting is most relevant to my adaptation, which requires all of the above steps. Thus, in the description of my practical work development process, I use the terms used in animation production. Their definitions are based on Paul Wells’ glossary for animation

²²⁸ Dyer, *Change Your Thoughts – Change Your Life*, 25.

²²⁹ Rāhula, *What the Buddha Taught*, xv.

scriptwriting in his book *Basics Animation: Scriptwriting* (2007)²³⁰ and Hans Bacher's book on production design for animation, *Dream Worlds: Production Design in Animation* (2012).²³¹ Although Wells and Bacher discuss these terms particularly for animation, the sequential graphic storytelling nature of illustrated e-books makes them relevant to my project. Most importantly, my process shares with the animation production the primary objective of using visuals to drive the narrative. Therefore, my references for the story development are drawn from animation, which results in a screenplay structure. In addition, my reference framework extends to comics. As Scott McCloud points out in *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1993), 'animation is sequential in time but not spatially juxtaposed as comics are. Each successive frame of the movie is projected on exactly the same space — the screen — while each frame of comics must occupy a different space. Space does for comics what time does for film'.²³² Made as a digital graphic novel to be read on the flat screen, my adaptation shares with comics the particular steps of staging, lettering and designing speech balloons. The above references from animation and comics highlight again how the medium of illustrated e-books is a hybrid that draws various elements from other media that employ sequential graphic storytelling. These terms originated in animation production (partially overlapping with comics) and are listed in the appendix at the end of this thesis.

²³⁰ Wells, *Scriptwriting*, 169–171.

²³¹ Bacher, *Dream Worlds*. Taylor & Francis.

²³² McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 7.

As I suggested in chapters 1 and 2, interactivity reflects the diversity of the readership and can be employed to engage them to be part of the storytelling. In addition, illustrated e-books can be used to negotiate opposing local and global tendencies in adaptations. The theoretical discussion in the previous chapters suggests that one of the key components of engagement with the modern readership through interactivity is the hero Monkey, a character that transcends cultural barriers. Thus, my adaptation experiments with the medium's interactivity. Rather than giving readers a fixed design of Monkey, the book lets them build their own versions of him. By doing so, the interactivity reflects the diversity of the digital readership. The contextualisation also reveals that illustrated e-books can combine the seemingly contradictory aspects of interactivity and authorship. However, this capacity by no means neglects the concept of authorship in the storytelling. On the contrary, the authorship concept enables systemic control of the respectful representation of cultural heritage, as I will further demonstrate through the making of my practical work.

Based on the understanding of transculturality in storytelling and the findings from the case studies, my adaptation was developed in the following order:

First, I drafted the overall narrative based on the linear hero's journey and Gustav Freytag's²³³ structure. Linear as it is, the narrative structure carries the circular model of Joseph Campbell's hero's journey.²³⁴ It also signifies the 'Karmic law of cause and

²³³ See figure 3

²³⁴ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Pantheon Books.

effects',²³⁵ which is often symbolised by circular movements in Asian art and culture. The narrative structure was developed in a double journeys process, which consists of the physical journey of the hero and his internal conflicts. On the outside level, the story consists of external events happening around the main character, Monkey. On a deeper level, the narrative reflects the inner world of Monkey and its development.

Once the draft of the narrative structure was established, my practice turned to visual experiments. The process began with the storyboard translating the narrative contents into visuals. In parallel, the character designs were developed, together with production designs. Consequently, the final art of the adaptation was made entirely on digital media, resulting in the final adaptation. Given that the practical component makes up 25 percent of the research scope, it is not a final app form of the illustrated e-book. Instead, it is developed as a demo to test the feasibility of the theory and can be implemented into the completion. Although further development would require a technical team to convert the designs into app form to be read on a mobile reading device such as a tablets or smartphone, my narrative and visual development, as explained later in this chapter, are concrete plans to execute the final adaptation. In addition, the simulation that is incorporated with my research demonstrates the final reading experience, combining visualisation and limited animation with interactivity.

The next sections go into the creative process of my adaptation, from story development to visual exploration.

²³⁵ Humphreys, *Karma and Rebirth*, 8

4.2 Story Development

A Dialogue with the Original Work

Although the adaptation reintroduces major story events from the original work, many of its narrative elements are drawn from my personal creative decisions. While I tried to consider the project's research aim of universality, these narrative choices are still driven by my Asian cultural background. Nevertheless, as an artist whose life experience spans across Asia and Europe, my creative practice reflects my own personal roots as well as the influence of the Western paradigm. A similar background can be found in other creative endeavours with cross-cultural influence. Their work only display the cross-cultural influence but the contents also reflect the conflicts within trans cultural identity. One example is Iranian comic artist Marjane Satrapi and her comic *Persepolis* (2008).²³⁶ With the 'interplay of visual styles, the realistic to the iconic', the comic demonstrates her cultural roots, especially 'the visual representation of Islamic women' (2007)²³⁷ in the visual form of comics, as well as her Western influences. Therefore, the memoir achieves both the depiction of her cultural identity and the universal appeal to readers from other cultures. Another artist who presents cross-cultural influences is Gene Luen Yang, the Asian American cartoonist behind *American Born Chinese*, a notable visual adaptation of *JTW* that I discussed in the case studies. Yang was born American with a strong Chinese family upbringing. He was then

²³⁶ Satrapi, *Persepolis I & II*, Random House.

²³⁷ Basu, 'Crossing Cultures/Crossing Genres', 1–19.

influenced by Disney²³⁸ and later, when he became a comic artist, his strong Chinese roots become very evident in his work, most notably in *American Born Chinese*. Yang's work is widely recognised not only because it is universally appealing but also because he 'demonstrates the potential of comics to broaden our understanding of diverse cultures and people' (2016).²³⁹ Similarly, during my practice, I never tried to divorce my Asian roots from my Western influence. On the contrary, my creative process to some extent offers an account of an individual with a culturally diverse background.

Figure 44: Examples from Marjane Satrapi's comic *Persepolis* (2000–2004).

²³⁸ Yang, 'Gene Yang Speaks as Part of Graphic Novel Speakers Series', YouTube.

²³⁹ MacArthur Foundation, 'Gene Luen Yang: Graphic Novelist, Class of 2016'.

Figure 45: Examples from Gene Yang's comic *American Born Chinese* (2006).

In further consideration of the negotiation between local and universal aspects of *JTW*, my story development began with choosing story elements from the first seven chapters of *JTW* (from Anthony Yu's unabridged English translation).²⁴⁰ The selection criteria are based on the primary goal of presenting the familiar classic story while leaving space for creative twists. Among the details taken from the source text, some elements shape the main story events, while others suggest contrasting interpretations of the hero character. Below is a list of core elements I extracted from *JTW*. On the one hand, they carry the familiarity that is shared among most of *JTW*'s loyal adaptations. As main story events of these adaptations, they maintain fidelity and pay respect to the source text's local traditions. On the other hand, these story events are presented in a narrative structure that can accommodate new interpretations. These creative twists are

²⁴⁰ Yu, *The Journey to the West, 4 Vols.* University of Chicago Press.

influenced by contemporary contexts as well as by my cross-cultural experiences, which are combined to achieve universal appeal. Most importantly, they achieve the objective of novelty mentioned above, repetition without replication.

No.	Story Events	Familiar Interpretations	New Angles of Interpretation in My Adaptation	Practical Challenges Answered by the New Angles
1	<p>Monkey's exceptional birth: Born of a rock in the middle of the ocean, hatched by the divine energy of the Sun and the Moon.</p> <p>His master names him Wukong (Not Knowing).</p>	<p>Monkey as an exceptional being, born to manifest magnificent things.</p>	<p>Monkey never knows his parents or his real origin, hence the name Not Knowing. He wanders from place to place looking for a family, a tribe, to make sense of his being. The lack of family makes him vulnerable to father figure characters whom he admires.</p> <p>Monkey is responsible for his tribe and is determined to polish his magical powers and improve his manner to become a god. Yet, his untamed nature yearns for freedom and denies being bound by any rule. This conflict leads to others' misunderstanding of him and his motives.</p>	<p>Novelty and universal appeal: This is a modern take on the classic hero, who is often seen as almighty with godly power. Showing him as a vulnerable hero with common human problems makes him more human and relatable.</p>

2	<p>Monkey and his tribe come to Mountain of Flowers and Fruit. As the bravest of them, Monkey finds a wonderful cave behind the waterfall and is named their king. The monkeys call this mountain home and prosper. But this also attracts the other demons' attention and jealousy. They want to take over the mountain for themselves.</p> <p>The monkey tribe's prosperity on the mountain and the threat of invasion by the other demons force Monkey</p>	<p>Monkey's happiest days are on the mountain. The mountain is like a heaven on earth to the tribe, where they prosper and live happily in harmony. Monkey is praised and loved by his people.</p>	<p>This story is told by one of the monkeys. The story portrays a powerful, selfless king who goes the distance to stand for his own people. It also hints that his monkey tribe relies on him and take his protection for granted. This story is as highly subjective as the hateful stories told by other characters about Monkey. It depicts an idolised Monkey King who does everything he can to protect the tribe. However, the story also shows that his tribe lives off of him and his protection. They count on him for everything rather than trying to make a living and protect themselves. Their idolisation and devotion to him hints at a burden Monkey has to bear, rather than a glory.</p>	<p>Same as the above twist, this story suggests a contemporary interpretation of Monkey as a modern man with responsibilities to his family and community. Monkey is tied to the glory as well as the responsibility of a good king caring for his people, who cannot protect themselves. This leads to the later story details that suggest he sees it as a burden.</p>
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	out to learn magical powers in order to protect his tribe.			
	Monkey finds a great master who teaches him 72 tricks of transformation and introduces him to the teachings of Taoism.	Monkey has a natural talent for magic art. He learns quickly and soon excels in the art of transformation.	Although Monkey sets out to study magic in order to defend his tribe, his personal motive is to improve himself and he is looking for a higher life purpose. However, he is still unsure after he has mastered the magical powers. His master, therefore, advises him to look inside himself instead of searching in the world of matter.	Local traditions representation: The relationship between Monkey and his master (a Taoist monk) can be used to present the Three Teachings, the core of Chinese philosophy and belief.
3	Monkey becomes a great friend of Buffalo King, a powerful demon who has a beautiful but cunning wife, Princess Iron Fan.	The two of them are exceptional in their tribes and therefore become good brothers.	The bond between Monkey and Buffalo King upsets Buffalo King's cunning wife, who used to be a fairy in Heaven. Thus, she plans to frame Monkey with the help of the fairies, to turn her husband, the demons, the gods and	Novelty and universal appeal: This creative twist uses a character from the source text who is often not mentioned in adaptations of the story's first seven chapters. Princess Iron Fan serves as

			everyone else against him.	the ‘devil woman’ character who takes advantage of Monkey’s enemy to attack him.
4	Monkey visits the Dragon King’s Palace looking for a suitable weapon and steals the ocean’s measuring stick to use as his own iron staff.	Monkey is powerful, arrogant, and has little respect for authority.	This story is told by the Dragon King, who is not pleased to be robbed of his treasure. Yet, he admires Monkey’s determination to protect his tribe and his magical strength.	
5	Monkey visits Hell to change the record of life and death.	Monkey spites death and cannot tolerate the natural order of life and death.	This encounter is told by the King of Hell, a despicable character. His story shows a dreadful, arrogant Monkey who dares to change the order of Heaven.	Cultural representation and novelty: The King of Hell presents the Three Teachings’ vision of Hell as a part of the Celestial Bureaucracy, judging life and death. Yet, my creative take on this concept gives Hell a contemporary look, suggesting a

				modern-day bureaucracy that crushes creativity and democracy.
6	In order to control Monkey, the God of the Northern Star talks him into taking a small post in Heaven as a horse-keeper. But after learning of the inferiority of the post, Monkey gets angry and leaves Heaven.	Heaven tricks the arrogant yet stupid Monkey into taking low-ranked posts. Monkey, who is obsessed with being equal to the gods and yearns for power, falls for the trick.	Monkey still feels alienated in his tribe despite being their king and having their respect. Therefore, when a graceful god comes to him, he hopes to become better than a monkey and live among the gods. The story of Monkey leaving the first post is told by the horse-keeper, a man who was beaten by him. It shows an arrogant, angry Monkey who is also powerful.	
7	To get Monkey under control again, Jade Emperor lets him watch over the Heaven garden.	Monkey, tricked twice by the Heaven gods, takes another low-ranked, insignificant post.	The story details are told by the Garden God, who is a wise old man. He believes in Monkey's good nature and wants to polish his character through meditation and gardening work.	Cultural representation: The Garden God portrays the flexibility, the forgiving, accepting nature highlighted by both Buddhism and Taoism. He is also an image of a

				common Chinese person practicing the Three Teachings and living a humble life.
8	One day, during the grand Heaven banquet, the magic peaches are all picked from the garden. Monkey is the main suspect.	Everyone thinks Monkey picks all the magic peaches to eat for himself to avenge the Heaven gods' disrespect for him.	Princess Iron Fan commissions the Heaven fairies to pick all the peaches and lets everyone believe Monkey did it. The fairies report the crime to all the Heaven gods (who already think of Monkey as a threat), implying that Monkey is the main suspect. Affected by prejudice, everyone believes them.	Sharing the same objective with number 3 above, the conspiracy turns Monkey's crime into a mystery.
9	Monkey is tried in front of the Heaven gods, but denies Heaven's accusations. When he breaks out of the chain, no one can capture him.	Monkey is a headstrong, powerful, fearless demon who can turn Heaven upside down.	Monkey can easily escape from the capture. But if the Heavenly army cannot capture him, they will turn his mountain and tribe to ash. Therefore, he surrenders and agrees to be tried for a crime he did not commit. During the trial, he yields but denies the	Universal appeal and cultural representation: This detail highlights Monkey's dilemma between being a good King to his people and being free. This reflects the everyday challenge of a modern man, who is

			<p>accusations. However, when his deepest fear is touched, he gets angry and turns against Heaven. This is also his point of no return.</p>	<p>torn between self-interest and responsibility to his community. This is also a major teaching in Confucianism, in which one should always choose the community's harmony over one's own.</p>
10	<p>The Heaven gods have to summon Buddha to get Monkey under control.</p>	<p>Only Buddha can bring down Monkey's arrogance and power.</p>	<p>Buddha is not an almighty god who comes to punish. Buddha is an enlightened being. Therefore, my adaptation suggests that Buddha in the story is not an external character, but Monkey's higher self. Monkey's conversation with Buddha is, in fact, a conversation between his confused human nature and his enlightened self.</p>	<p>Cultural representation and novelty: Buddha is often portrayed as a real man in other visual adaptations of <i>JTW</i>, as Monkey's punisher. Yet, Buddha means 'the enlightened one' inside every being. Thus, showing Buddha as an inner voice which leads Monkey out of his doubts is not only my personal creative twist on the story,</p>

				but also pays respect to the Eastern concept of Buddha.
11	Once Buddha comes, he puts Monkey under a rocky mountain on Earth, where he is kept for 500 years. Once Monkey is confined under the mountain, peace returns to Heaven and Earth.	Monkey is being punished for his actions and choices.	Monkey is put under a giant mountain to contemplate his life, his past actions. That appears to be a punishment, but it can be his choice to release himself of his fears, and atone for his sins. Monkey cannot change his punishment, but he can choose how he takes it. His imprisonment, in fact, sets him free of his arrogance and illusions. By making peace with himself, Monkey moves closer to the spiritual path he has always looked for without knowing.	Novelty and universal appeal: The story's resolution puts the hero into a more active role to choose the ending for himself, rather than being punished. Thus, he is still considered an archetypal hero mastering his own fate. His song at the end of the story also presents the ideology of the Three Teachings. Therefore, it aligns with the source text's cultural traditions.

Table 5: Story elements taken from *Journey to the West*.

With the above story elements taken from *JTW*, the next big question is how to organise them in a narrative structure that can deliver both universal appeal and respect for local traditions.

Linear and Nonlinear Integration

The theoretical discussion of narrative types and the findings from successful case studies (*Uproar in Heaven*, *American Born Chinese*) call for a combination of linear and nonlinear narratives in my adaptation. Therefore, as I explained in chapter 2, I employ the hero's journey structure described by Joseph Campbell and the basic narrative development by Gustav Freytag²⁴¹ for the story development. In addition, in order to engage the reader's diversity with the narrative, my adaptation integrates a nonlinear, metonymic approach at the beginning of the story. This opening act creates narrative gaps that trigger reader interpretation and, later, participation. This strategy aims to accommodate the readers' diversity and the universal appeal. Therefore, the integration of linear and nonlinear narrative is implemented in two places. The first is in the multi-narrators' personal stories, in which different characters reflect on their encounters with Monkey and their contrasting opinions about him. This narrative treatment is referenced from the Rashomon approach as explained in chapter 2. The second is a unique digital feature that allows readers to visually construct the hero character after reading about him in the other character's stories. These two integrations invite the multicultural audience to create their own diverse versions of Monkey. The narrative itself, however, is not altered by their visual choices. With this feature, my

²⁴¹ See figure 3.

adaptation explores how digital tools can help strengthen the narrative treatment and engage readers in illustrated e-books.

Figure 46: Story structure of *The Song of Stone Monkey* with three acts and five steps.

In making of this adaptation, I amalgamated personal influences from classic fairy tales, my Asian roots and my experiences living in both Asia and Europe. In particular, I took inspiration from the modern-day context to portray the hero as a representation of the universal yearning for self-improvement and freedom. At the same time, he wrestles with dilemmas similar to those of modern humanity.

It is also worth mentioning that while the adaptation is an exploration with very clear research goals, it is also a personal creative work that reflects my own background, thinking, aspirations and artistic choices. These choices are primarily informed by the research, but in many respects, are also driven by my own practice. The personal influences are, however, always kept in balance to avoid obstructing the research goals.

Narrative Structure

As I explained earlier, I employed Freytag's narrative structure and Campbell's hero's journey. Yet, the most important task of the narrative strategy is to involve readers participation in the storytelling. This requires the combination of the linear structure with the metonymic approach introduced earlier by the discussion on the Rashomon effects. I chose Freytag's model for its linear, fundamental structure, which suits the story. Campbell's hero's journey has been applied to create universally appealing franchises such as *Star Wars* (2014),²⁴² proving its relevance to my research goal of universal appeal. Screenwriter Keith Cunningham (2008) talked about Campbell's influence on George Lucas' work, noting that with the hero's quest story, 'the era of the blockbuster mentality was born, and a high-concept, high-stakes approach to story development was initiated'.²⁴³ Although my adaptation does not follow Campbell's structure closely, it shares the cyclic narrative model in which the resolution presents a return to the beginning.

In further describing the universality of the hero's journey, Christopher Vogler posited in his book *The Writer's Journey* that 'every hero needs both an inner and an outer problem'.²⁴⁴ From this viewpoint, Vogler argues that the hero's journey is not only external, but also internal. In other words, 'it may be an outward journey to an actual place: a labyrinth, forest or cave, a strange city or country, a new locale that becomes

²⁴² Batty, 'Are You Monomythic?' The Conversation.

²⁴³ Cunningham, *The Soul of Screenwriting*, 55.

²⁴⁴ Vogler, *The Writer's Journey*, 52.

the arena for her conflict with antagonistic, challenging forces. But there are as many stories that take the hero on an inward journey, one of the minds, the heart, the spirit'. Addressing a universally appealing hero character and story, I incorporate an inward journey into the narrative, making Monkey's story a journey in the physical world as well as a story of self-development.

Thus, the narrative of my adaptation shows two journeys simultaneously: the external journey, which is defined clearly by major story events, and the inward journey of the hero, which generates empathy from readers throughout the narrative. For the outer journey, my adaptation is based on events taken from the original story of *JTW*. For the emotional journey, readers can witness Monkey's internal conflict to understand his dilemma. In other words, Monkey's journey starts with outer world events. From there, it progresses to his inner world, reflecting his thoughts, conflicts and dreams.

Still, another challenge of this structure is the dialogue between linearity and interactivity. The external hero's journey is mapped out in detail by Campbell, and the internal journey by Vogler. Both propose a linear, straightforward structure. Interactivity and interpretation gaps, on the other hand, require more experimental structures, including nonlinear approaches. Therefore, my adaptation is rendered as a linear, cyclic story structure. Yet, the story is divided into five stages and three acts (informed by Freytag's basic narrative structure), which are developed through major story events. Compared to Campbell's, Freytag's model does not include all the specific steps and thus allows more flexibility in narrative choices. For that reason, interactivity can be woven into the narrative in nonlinear scenes and sequences to create emotional engagement with readers as well as deliver a multidimensional reading experience.

Thus, the interactivity serves not simply as add-on gimmicks to the storytelling. Instead, it enriches the universal appeal of the storytelling and reflects the diversity of the readership. At the same time, as explained in chapter 2, a big challenge of interactivity is ensuring the readers' choices do not interfere with the narrative structure and misrepresent the cultural roots of the source text. To accomplish this, Sissy Helff and Julie Woletz propose an approach that excludes generation of new stories but 'includes explicit means of influencing the telling of a given story. Such means comprise participatory modes on the level of presentation and interactive modes on the level of communication, which in turn lead to specific interfaces and new relations between the author, the story, and the users'.²⁴⁵ Therefore, the interactivity in my adaptation affects only the visual presentation of the narrative to provide systemic unity to the story. This also guarantees accurate cultural representation of the content.

Accordingly, readers will experience a double journey in the narrative. In the outer world, the story events take place around the hero Monkey. Simultaneously, the inner journey reflects the hero's self-development and the rebirth of a new self and identity. Below is the story treatment that outlines the narrative approach in three main acts. The first act introduces the hero through different narrators' stories. The second act shows the battle between Monkey and Heaven, leading to his uproar. The last act is his encounter with Buddha and his redemption. Accordingly, the narrative structure progresses through the five steps listed below:

²⁴⁵ Helff and Woletz, 134.

1. Exposition, or first act: introduction of the main characters, who they are and what they want
2. Rising action: fights between Monkey and Heaven's army
3. Turning point: capture and trial of Monkey in Heaven
4. Falling action: Monkey's conversation with Buddha
5. Resolution: Monkey's deal with Buddha and the story's ending

Figure 47: The cyclic outer (physical) hero's journey in *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

Figure 48: The cyclic inner (emotional) hero's journey in *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

Gustav Freytag's five steps are implemented into the cyclic journey of outer events. The first part (exposition) introduces the hero through several stories told by other characters. It describes his conflicts and enemies and ends by hinting at danger for the hero. The story then goes into the rising action with conflicts between Monkey and Heaven, and his hard choice between his own freedom and the safety of his people. This part ends with the fall of the hero. The next stage is his unjust confrontation, in which he is alone against his enemies, leading to his uprising. This is also a big turning point, bringing him to a point of no return, in which he burns the Heavenly Palace. Next, the story details his conversation with Buddha, who has come to get him under control. This falling action is not a fight, but shows how the hero's choices bring him to the ending, his resolution to end all the conflicts and grow.

This emotional journey reflects my goal of portraying Monkey as a classic fairy tale hero with a modern man's internal conflict. The journey reflects what Vogler described as progress in which 'the hero grows and changes' from a state of limited awareness to increased awareness and then to change, from despair to hope, weakness to strength, folly to wisdom, love to hate, and back again at the resolution.

Having said that, the ending of my adaptation does not follow the tradition of *JTW*'s past adaptations, which focus on Monkey's uproar in Heaven, leading to his punishment and realisation through redemption. Instead, it suggests that the only enemy Monkey has to defeat is his own ego and ignorance. Thus, the story's ending defies conventional expectations: Monkey, as a powerful king and an immortal, realises his weakness and decides to redeem his sins by confining himself to an isolated rocky

mountain and asking the world to forget him. His choice is not victory but peace for himself as well as others. Monkey's choice in the adaptation might be unfamiliar to a non-Chinese reader because it seems self-destructive. However, it reflects the philosophy found in the Taoist teaching of the *Tao Te Ching* (translated by Stephen Mitchell):

Simplicity, patience, compassion.

These three are your greatest treasures.

Simple in actions and in thoughts, you return to the source of being.

Patient with both friends and enemies, you accord with the way things are.

Compassionate toward yourself, you reconcile all beings in the world.²⁴⁶

In choosing to be forgotten, Monkey reconciles with himself and achieves personal freedom. Thus, Monkey's choice imprisons his physical body, but frees his mind and helps him find himself, as taught in this verse: 'Knowing others is intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom. / Mastering others is strength; mastering yourself is true power'. On the one hand, Monkey's emotional growth is indeed human and universal. On the other, Monkey's choice at the end of the story reflects the Taoist philosophy that my adaptation aims to present.

Based on the above five-step structure and double journeys, the next section goes into the details of each act, followed by the treatments for the storyboard. As the story is visually driven, the storyboard is crucial to the narrative development. Therefore, they should be examined together. The visualisation direction, including staging, character

²⁴⁶ Lao-tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, 206.

designs and stylistic exploration, is displayed in the storyboard, but will be discussed in detail later, in the visual development.

Act 1 – Introducing the hero through a metonymic structure. As explained above, much of the adaptation's universality comes from its linear narrative structure. Yet, I also adopt nonlinearity in the beginning to build readers' curiosity, emotional connection and interpretations of Monkey. Therefore, the introductory act consists of real-time linear events as well as characters' flashbacks. The flashbacks are mini-stories within the adaptation, relating these characters' encounters with Monkey and their contrasting opinions. However, Monkey is not visually present in any of their stories. This metonymic approach is not commonly used in illustrated books, but we can find many good examples in cinema. For instance, *Citizen Kane* (1941) starts with the death of the main character. Slowly, from the puzzle pieces given in other characters' stories of him, we can understand who he was and what his problems were. *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962)²⁴⁷ also tells the tale of an outlaw through the stories of people who know him. The audience never sees his face, but understands who he is through other characters' opinions of him. Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950) employs a plot device in which various characters give alternative, self-serving and contradictory versions of the same incident.

Taking a similar approach, I do not clearly depict Monkey in the first act as I want to experiment with a suggestive visual narrative which leaves the hero unseen. This removes the rigid visualisation of the hero as well as his cultural barriers. In this way, the approach adds universal appeal to the presentation of a local story. Also, as

²⁴⁷ Rosi, *Salvatore Giuliano*, Cinema International Corporation, Italy.

discussed in chapter 2, Monkey is a unique hero character with universal qualities that make him too big for any single visualisation. This is evident in the visual diversity of the chosen case studies. Thus, I do not want to restrict him within a single design in my adaptation.

Figure 49: Impact of the unseen hero on the narrators in *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

The King of Hell's flashback scene (top) reflects how Monkey came to Hell to violently beat him up and destroy The Book of Life and Death. The Horse Keeper's flashback scene shows how Monkey got angry at the gods and left Heaven.

In the first act, different characters present Monkey through their contradicting stories. In addition, these stories give clues so that readers can construct an idea of Monkey in their mind and initiate a cause-and-effect sequence that leads to their participation in constructing the visual design of Monkey in the next act.

This approach also respects the diversity of the readers by giving them space to fill in the gaps using their own subjective interpretations of a classic local story. This answers directly to the challenge of balancing local and universal. For instance, some stories about Monkey are told by his monkey worshippers, while some are from the perspective of the gods whom he upsets and some from the demons he conquered. Obviously, these parties have very different personal opinions of him, and by putting them together, we use these puzzle pieces to build our own opinions of Monkey.

Using the hints and clues given in these puzzle pieces, readers can visually construct Monkey in their minds. Each story in this first act is a vignette in which readers see only one aspect of Monkey. Going through them one by one, readers can connect the dots and see how these stories and events lead to the events in the main act of the narrative. Readers can find for themselves the answers to three main questions: First, who is Monkey? Second, what are his problems? Last, what happens to him?

In the context of illustrated e-books, where all must be visually clear, this approach is an experimental approach to storytelling. It considers that culturally diverse audiences can react differently to the same story. By introducing, but not showing, the main character, the adaptation lets readers slowly construct their ideas of the main hero without being limited to one image of him. In this way, the adaptation can introduce

Monkey from different perspectives. It lets readers understand the conflicts that make him behave the way he does and form their own judgements about him.

By giving the reader this freedom, the adaptation fulfils the requirement of bringing together local traditions and global appeal. The character Monkey is both local and universal. On the one hand, the adaptation still presents Monkey as a classic hero with Chinese cultural roots in the story-world of *JTW*, which strongly reflects Chinese cosmology. On the other hand, the visual choices, with a wide variety of styles and expressions, allow the diverse readership around the world to construct him based on their own visions.

Act 1 opens on Earth, on the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit, with the monkeys discussing their King. An old monkey tells stories of how their king came to make their tribe one of the strongest tribes on Earth. From there, the story goes into the territory of the Buffalo King, Monkey's former best friend turned enemy. The monkeys gather there to discuss how to solve the 'Monkey problem' and how to bring him down. The gathering suggests a conspiracy to frame Monkey, who is too powerful to defeat by force. Later, during the yearly banquet of the gods in Heaven, the story introduces several characters who tell about their personal encounters with Monkey and their opinions of him. These stories are highly contradictory, but they all lead to the conclusion that Monkey is a threat, a powerful monster, who may be dangerous if not kept under control. However, at the time of the banquet, he is being held under Heavenly supervision and is no longer a concern. But while the gods are having their banquet, an incident happens that implies Monkey has committed the heinous crime of stealing all

the most precious fruit from Heaven's garden. This angers the gods, and the Jade Emperor, King of Heaven, sends an army to Earth to capture Monkey.

This introductory act presents a wide array of local traditions, most of which relate to the Chinese philosophy of the Three Teachings: Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism. These three central beliefs have distinct Chinese historical roots, but as they became more embedded across China, they shaped and influenced each other and were no longer exclusive. That means one person could practice Taoism, patronise Buddhist temples and follow Confucian rituals.²⁴⁸ Ryan Bradeen and Jean Johnson, in their article *Using Monkey to Teach Religions of China* (2005), advocated that the cosmology depicted in *JTW* reflects the 'religious experience of everyday Chinese' and even suggested that *JTW* could be used to teach Chinese religion.²⁴⁹ The story shows the 'complex interconnectedness of Chinese philosophies and religions, the myriad of divinities and pantheons when it comes to Chinese religion and cosmology'.²⁴⁹ For instance, the Heaven Palace is a reflection of the Confucian order that formed imperial China, led by the King (Jade Emperor). The Heaven gods resemble the mandarins in the Imperial Palace. Monkey's master is a Taoist reclusive monk who chooses to live in the forest to be one with nature. He signifies the concept of 'oneness', which is central to Taoist belief. Although the Buddha has not been introduced in this act, the resolution of the adaptation in the last act focuses on a dialogue between Monkey and Buddha. The

²⁴⁸ Ebrey and Gregory, *Religion and Society in T'ang and Sung China*, University of Hawaii Press.

²⁴⁹ Bradeen and Johnson, 'Using Monkey to Teach Religions of China', 39–40.

first act also features Hell, which deals with death and the afterlife, a belief shared by both Buddhism and Taoism.²⁵⁰

Thus, to respect the local traditions of the source text, it is crucial that the introductory act of the adaptation presents the major characters that represent the Three Teachings. For example, the narrative features Jade Emperor, the imperial palace of Heaven, Hell, the Taoist gods and how they all coexist in the same cosmology. This introduction, while honouring the local roots of the character, also acquaints readers with the story-world, considering that the global readership may lack background information about the characters.

Both local culture and readership's diverse interpretations in this act are necessary for next part, the personalisation of the hero. This section is not part of the story, but is crucial to the visual storytelling. After the first act offers narrative clues and gaps allowing the diverse readership to form their own opinions of the unseen hero, this part allows them to visualise him according to the provided visual assets. Their choices do not affect the narrative, but without their participation in the visualisation of the hero, the storytelling is not complete.

Therefore, following the introductory act that provides space for subjective interpretation and imagination, I want to give readers freedom they cannot find in printed books. Using the visual elements provided, they can build a visual of Monkey by themselves. Thus, the visual designs of Monkey that the readers create might suggest their cultural diversity.

²⁵⁰ Ebrey and Gregory, *Religion and Society*.

Audience diversity reflected in the interpretation of the unseen hero. As discussed earlier in this chapter, my comparative visual analysis of the case studies suggests that Monkey is too large a character to be confined to a single visual form. He is so complex that I, the storyteller/visualiser, cannot take the liberty of choosing only one way of presenting him to the audience.

As *JTW* is a story that can be enjoyed by readers of any age, how readers visualise him varies greatly, too. For example, a child may imagine Monkey very differently from an adult. A child might see Monkey's playful, spontaneous, animated nature, whereas an adult might see Monkey as a wise, charismatic king who loves and stands for his people. The adaptation is not intended to serve any specific audience, so its visuals should reflect how different audiences interpret Monkey. Chinese readers familiar with the Monkey King might choose to build the character's look based on both their cultural influences and the stories told in act 1. A reader previously unfamiliar with the story might have a very different image, independent of any influence other than the narrative clues in act 1.

Starting in act 2, readers' unique visualisations will determine Monkey's appearance in the rest of the book. Although the individual visual options are predetermined, readers may mix them to come up with their own unique designs. From one feature to the next, readers can choose Monkey's body shape, facial features, costume, weapons and even his vehicle.

This feature is not a gimmick to add fun elements to the reading experience but truly lets readers construct their own interpretations of what the hero looks like. In doing so, I, as the artist who renders all the individual elements, can control the aesthetic

consistency of Monkey in relation to other characters in the book. At the same time, I can let readers participate in the visualisation of the story by crafting their unique visions of the hero.

Figure 50: Step-by-step Monkey builder feature which lets users design Monkey in *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

The idea of choosing or building a unique character to navigate through a story is not new. On the contrary, similar functions can be seen in many computer games which let players pick a character to start the journey. Although these are pre-built characters with few personalisation options available, players are still given some freedom to pick what they want the hero to be like.

However, the intention is entirely different here. This research aims to let readers proceed through the narrative in act 1 to gain bits of information about the hero and see him through the opinions of others. Thus, when personalising Monkey, the player's character constructions let them continue the story as the hero they envisioned in the stories in act 1.

Most importantly, the comparative visual analysis of Monkey in the case studies is the reference framework for my visual explorations. Answering to a global readership with vast cultural diversity, the character designs of Monkey are drawn from my research of different aesthetic styles and cultures as well as the theoretical findings from the case studies. For instance, the Monkey visualisation steps in figure 50 show an early experiment in which I explored visual designs for Monkey with different styles and ethnic features. The variety of graphic styles presents influences from Japanese Manga, Latin American graphic posters, Eastern European children's books, German expressionism and French Comics. By providing these visual assets, the adaptation accommodates the cultural diversity of the audience and allows them to build the hero based on their ethnicity, age and personal interpretation. This design process will be explained in greater depth in the character design section.

Act 2 – Main action of the capture and Monkey's trial. The main action starts with Heaven's army invading Monkey's territory on Earth. From this point on, Monkey is fully present in the visuals based on each reader's personalised choices. In act 2, there are several scenes where Monkey can be played by the reader. Therefore, the character is not fully visualised in each scene, but is shown as only a basic body structure. Once readers select from the personalisation options, their choices will construct the complete

visual of Monkey. The visual options are deconstructed in a technique similar to that used in cut-out animation. As the name suggests, cut-out animation involves cutting out or manipulating paper drawings or prints to simulate movement.²⁵¹ In considering the global appeal and the cultural roots my adaptation introduces through the story-world, the high degree of artifice and theatricality associated with the paper cut-out technique makes it especially well-suited for animations which are fantastic, dreamlike and surreal. This technique serves the research goals of my transcultural adaptation as well as my artistic vision.

Figure 51: Example of the cut-out animation technique, which deconstructs a character into body parts and stimulates animation by adjusting these parts.

Following the original story, with his power, Monkey can easily escape but chooses not to. He stays to face Heaven as otherwise his people might be killed. The battles between him and the gods end with Monkey being captured and brought to Heaven.

²⁵¹ Barnes et al., 'Video Puppetry', 124.

During the trial in Heaven, Monkey defends himself in front of the gods. However, the gods are sure it was Monkey who stole all the magic peaches and they condemn him. They hurt Monkey's pride and trigger his fury. Monkey breaks the chains, turns himself into a giant, and sets fire to Heaven. No gods in Heaven can stop him. Finally, they have to seek the help of Buddha, leading to the end of the story: the conversation between Buddha and Monkey.

Act 3 – The conversation with Buddha and Monkey's redemption. Buddha enters the story, not as a clearly depicted character, but as an inner voice of Monkey. Monkey admits to himself and to Buddha that he feels lost, not at peace as a powerful immortal who defeated all Heaven's gods nor as the Monkey King. He admits that after all, he only wants to be free, like in the old days, and realises he had it all without knowing it. The conversation between Buddha and Monkey implies that Monkey's ending is neither a defeat nor an act of punishment from Buddha, but Monkey's own choice to leave his pursuit of power and status behind. Once Heaven's gods come out of hiding, they see Buddha's palm holding Monkey inside. The palm flips to create a mountain on Earth, suggesting Monkey is now underneath it. The end features life on Earth and Heaven after Monkey is gone. Life goes on, and no one ever sees him again, although his song of freedom can still be heard for many years to come.

In serving the above objective, Monkey is central to the narrative development, not only of the visual designs, but even more so of the characterisation. My introduction in chapter 2 discussed Monkey's significance and universality. However, in the chosen case studies, when it comes to building the audience's emotional connection with Monkey, few of them succeed, especially with non-Chinese audiences. For example, Ed

Young's *Monkey King* merely describes the exceptional birth of Monkey and his havoc in Heaven. *Uproar in Heaven* shows only the outer events of an almighty, powerful Monkey who plays tricks on the Heaven gods. The interactive games, although letting players navigate through the story-world as Monkey, almost completely disregard the emotional connection between the players and the character.

On the contrary, both *American Born Chinese* and *Monkey King: Hero is Back* present a Monkey with both external and internal conflicts that are relevant to a modern and universal audience. They both highlight the hero's self-doubt, egotism and faith, common issues in today's society according to Erich Fromm in *Man for Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics*: 'Today the lack of faith is the expression of profound confusion and despair. Once skepticism and rationalism were progressive forces for the development of thought; now they have become rationalizations for relativism and uncertainty'.²⁵²

In the same book, Fromm expounds on the point previously made by Karen Homey²⁵³ and Robert S. Lynd,²⁵⁴ that modern man is torn between two doctrines.

Besides the doctrine that one should not be selfish, the opposite is also propagandized in modern society: keep your own advantage in mind, act according to what is best for you; by so doing you will also be acting for the greatest advantage of all others. As a matter of fact, the idea that egotism is the basis of the general welfare is the principle on which competitive society has been built. It is puzzling that two such seemingly contradictory principles could be taught side by side in one culture; of the fact, however, there is no doubt. One result of this contradiction is confusion in the individual. Torn between the two doctrines, he is seriously blocked in the process of integrating his personality.

²⁵² Fromm, *Man for Himself: An Inquiry Into the Psychology of Ethics*, 325.

²⁵³ Homey, *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*, W. W. Norton & Company.

²⁵⁴ Lynd, *Knowledge for What?*, Princeton.

This confusion is one of the most significant sources of the bewilderment and helplessness of modern man.²⁵⁵

This state of uncertainty is also discussed by Peter Kreeft in *Back to Virtue: Traditional Moral Wisdom for Modern Moral Confusion*. He states that one thing we know for sure is that the modern man is lost.²⁵⁶ Similarly, my adaptation presents ‘the typical form of contemporary doubt’, as Fromm puts it. This state, however, is not something concrete, but an ‘attitude of indifference in which everything is possible, nothing is certain... An increasing number of people are feeling confused about everything, work, politics, and morals and, what is worse, they believe this very confusion to be a normal state of mind. They feel isolated, bewildered, and powerless; they do not experience life in terms of their own thoughts, emotions, and sense perceptions, but in terms of the experiences they are supposed to have’.²⁵⁷

A Chinese Odyssey and *Monkey King: Hero is Back* portray Monkey with this modern state of confusion. Thus, they create a strong emotional connection between a classic fairy tale hero and modern audiences. This brings me back to the emotional journey that Vogler described, in which the hero’s journey is not only external, but also inward.²⁵⁸ Developing on his point, I assert that this emotional journey can establish a connection between readers and the main character. If strongly established, it can transcend the character’s cultural barriers, which is one of the major challenges of

²⁵⁵ Fromm, *Man for Himself*, 211

²⁵⁶ Kreeft, *Back to Virtue*, Ignatius Press.

²⁵⁷ Fromm, 329–330.

²⁵⁸ Vogler, 17.

transcultural adaptation. Thus, the next big question for my adaptation is how to construct Monkey's emotional journey around his ability to connect with modern readers.

Dilemma of a modern man in a classic folk hero. One of the key components reconciling universality and local traditions in my adaptation is the characterisation of the hero Monkey. Therefore, Monkey's construction engages three main factors: The Chinese cultural reference, the universally appealing hero's journey and the character's relevance to the modern readership. The first objective is a crucial starting point, putting the character in a dialogue with the original work's local heritage. In addition, the second and third objectives address the question of universality.

Figure 52: Three core objectives in the characterisation of the hero Monkey in *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

One of the key factors in the adaptation's universality is the hero's double journey. On the outer level, Monkey's physical journey is rooted in archetypal myth. On the inner level, Monkey's emotional journey reflects what humans always long for: a sense of belonging, a home, a reason for being and others' approval.

As the hero of a classic Chinese story, Monkey embodies many aspects of the Three Teachings. This includes the Confucian ideal of a man's responsibility in the community. As a powerful king, Monkey does not need his tribe to win the battles with the Heaven gods or to improve his magical skills. Yet, he always returns to his tribe to protect it and leans on it to validate his life purpose. In this way, Monkey is a classic image of a man's place in his community. In my adaptation, he is portrayed as a powerful king who goes to all three worlds to protect his tribe. However, the adaptation also shows how this duty as a king and the need for others' approval become a burden in Monkey's life. This articulation of a classic hero reflects the confusion of a modern man and again promotes universal appeal. This yearning to belong in an increasingly confusing world is one to which modern readers around the world can relate. We see a similar attempt in the film *A Chinese Odyssey*, presented in chapter 3. The hero's confusion in the film distinguishes him from the typical powerful Monkey King images that often appear in visual adaptations of *JTW*. Similarly, Monkey in *The Song of Stone Monkey* resembles a modern man, lost and confused, beset by dilemmas and inner conflict. Rather than the arrogant Monkey, hungry for power, playing tricks on the gods to earn prestigious titles, he reflects the self-doubt and confusion of a modern man. Thus, he is more real and contemporary.

Monkey's conflict represent the human condition in its state of confusion and illusion. This confusion has been discussed through the layers of Chinese philosophical concepts, Campbell's analysis of the hero archetype and the roots of the *JTW* story. The Three Teachings philosophy refers to this as the state of ignorance, the endless cycles of *samsara*. This allegory is reflected in Monkey's name, Wukong (Not Knowing).

According to Taoism and Buddhism, this ‘not-knowing’ state is original sin, which led to man’s foolish actions, cravings and aversions. Monkey’s state of not knowing is shown in the source text and emphasised in my adaptation with highlighted details. In *The Song of Stone Monkey*, Monkey is in fact a child, always confused about his origin. Monkey has no parents, but is born of a rock in the middle of the ocean. He longs for the validation of others and the sense of belonging that he lacks, even in his own tribe. Not knowing where he came from, Monkey searches for an identity in a complex world of gods, demons and humans. He is nothing absolute. During his journey, Monkey realises he does not belong to the animal world, for he is too evolved compared to the animals. His inner good nature and godlike power stop him from joining the demons. Yet, he does not belong to Heaven either, for Heaven is so well constructed that his untamed, wild animal nature cannot fit. In his rebellion against Heaven, there is arrogance and enjoyment of power, but also a sense of desperation and separation. He is too godlike for Earth, yet too untamed for Heaven. He doesn’t belong to any of the three worlds. Still, he longs for a real home, a realisation of the self. His name, Not Knowing, reflects this desperation as well as his deepest fear. This deeply rooted anguish triggers his fury against Heaven.

For this reason, the actual resolution of the story is not to entrap Monkey under a mountain, as the story event suggests, but to give him the realisation he has always longed for. Monkey realises in his moment of epiphany that during his eventful life, he was only free when he first came to existence. In his encounters with different beings, he created entanglements and karmic debts in the three worlds without belonging to any of them. Nevertheless, his realisation does not free him from his debts; he still has to

pay for his past actions. However, it does free him from his desperation. The resolution, for Monkey, means he comes to terms with merely being *in* the world, not *of* it. He no longer has the need to belong to any group, any tribe. Monkey's redemption is his imprisonment on the mountain. But on the other hand, his spirit is released from worldly obligation. As an immortal, he does not die. The narrative suggests that he becomes part of the mountain, of nature, of Earth. His spirit, once freed, is aligned with the state of Nature, a state of selfless being. As the hero starts his journey and returns to the beginning in the cyclic movement, Monkey comes back to his origin. He is born out of nature and that is exactly where he belongs, to Life itself. He is too large to be called anything absolute. This state is tied closely to the Taoist concept famously described in the opening lines of the *Tao Te Ching*:

The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.

The name that can be named is not the eternal name.

The Tao is both named and nameless.

As nameless it is the origin of all things;

as named it is the Mother of 10,000 things.²⁵⁹

Thus, on one hand, Monkey is in line with the Three Teachings and stays authentic to the portrait of Monkey in the novel. On the other hand, his dilemma reflects a universal pattern of human yearning for self-identity and freedom. This need resonates with all readers despite their cultural backgrounds.

²⁵⁹ Dyer, 25.

Monkey's choice. The key resolution of the story is revealed in the dialogue between Monkey and Buddha at the beginning of act 3. With a highly stylised visualisation, the sequence suggests that the dialogue is, in fact, an inner monologue of Monkey's mind, which is very imbalanced and restless at that moment. In fact, for this scene, I drew from the Buddhist concept that calls this unsettling state the Monkey Mind. 'Just as a monkey, making its way through the forest or the jungle, grasps a brand, and releasing it, grasps another: So also that which is called mind, or thought, or consciousness arises in one way and ceases in another - day and night!' (Burton 2005).²⁶⁰ To calm the mind, Buddhists believe, one does not look outward for external help, but inward, to find the inner Buddha, one's highest state of awareness. Therefore, during the conversation, Buddha is not visually present.

The dialogue emphasises Monkey's dilemma, for now he has nowhere to go. He has defeated the Heaven gods and won justice for himself. However, his uproar is also his point of no return. He is now the enemy of Heaven. If he returns to his tribe, Heaven will send army troops after him and the demons on Earth will unite to overthrow him. He is no longer the king who brings peace and prosperity to his tribe. Wherever he goes, his enemies will follow him and his allies. If he disappears for good, his enemies will turn to his tribe for revenge. Monkey is the winner of the fight, but he will never be free unless he bows down, takes the blame and pays for his actions. He has to make an unpleasant choice, and he is fully aware of it.

²⁶⁰ Burton, 'Buddhism, Knowledge and Liberation', 76.

Buddha. In portraying Buddha, one of the most prominent concepts in Eastern spiritual traditions, it is important that the adaptation pays respect to what Buddha represents and how the concepts relate to the story. In *What the Buddha Taught*, Rāhula explains that Buddha can mean Gautama the Buddha, the Indian prince who founded Buddhism, but it also means the ‘Enlightened One’, the pure goodness in every being. In relation to the encounter between Monkey and Buddha in the story, Monkey, at this stage in his spiritual progress, represents Doubt and Ignorance. As Rāhula puts it,

According to the Buddha's teaching, doubt is one of the five Hindrances to the clear understanding of Truth and to spiritual progress. Doubt, however, is not a 'sin'... In fact, there is no 'sin' in Buddhism, as in is understood in some religions. The root of all evil is ignorance and false views.²⁶¹

Thus, Buddha, as the ‘enlightened nature’ inside every being, is not portrayed as any fixed image, bound by any gender or culture. Buddha also does not come from a mighty place to punish Monkey for any sin, but comes as an inner voice that leads Monkey to his realisation. Buddha, therefore, is depicted without an image, but as a presence of truth, the enlightened voice of Monkey’s higher awareness, leading him out of doubt and perplexity. This reflects Buddhist belief and gives the hero character an active role in making restitution for his mistakes and taking full responsibility for his past choices, yet gives him the free will to choose how his debt can be paid. This active role makes him a more contemporary, modern character rather than an old tale’s protagonist.

²⁶¹ Rāhula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 3.

Figure 53: Monkey's conversation with Buddha sequence in *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

The cyclic structure of the journey. In further highlighting the hero's cyclic journey, the adaptation also includes a prologue. In terms of narrative content, Monkey's story can be read with or without the prologue, but the prologue helps shape the story structure into a clearer loop, with the ending resonating back to the beginning.

The prologue opens with an old man and a little boy walking into the woods. They talk about the endless war that took away their families, then about the forest and Heaven. The old man sings a song he claims to have learned when he was the little boy's age on the mountain. He teaches the boy the song, saying it could be from a demon Monkey, who was said to be trapped there. The song is revisited at the end. Monkey, after falling under the mountain, can no longer be seen. However, other characters and the author's narration suggest he is trapped there as a prisoner. Thus, the song of the

mountain is his song, which later becomes the song of the forest. When people from the nearby village come to the mountain, they can hear the song. The ending shows a little village boy going up the mountain. He hears the song, learns it and sings along. The little boy in the final scene is the old man in the prologue.

This narrative loop is not a storytelling gimmick. Rather, it is intended to reflect the karmic wheel of samsara (birth and rebirth) of Chinese philosophy, where Life is seen not merely as a linear development of events, but as a circular movement of cause and effect (Hsu, O'Connor, and Lee 2009).²⁶² This concept is woven into the story development in two main places: first, in the cyclic double journey of the hero, and second, in Monkey's redemption for his follies through the imprisonment. His redemption is inevitable, but he pays for his actions with free will, not with forced punishment. His song shows regret, loss, loneliness and disillusionment. However, it also reflects freedom, spiritual growth and the hero's reconciliation with his fate.

With references to Chinese philosophy, Monkey demonstrates not only his universality but also his Eastern heritage. Monkey's yearnings are universal, but they are also deeply rooted in the source text traditions. His choice to be forgotten and imprisoned might be an unusual concept to non-Asian readers, but it reflects the Chinese philosophy of the Three Teachings, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. Because of its preference for single authority figures, 'for thousands of years Chinese rulers chose Confucianism as their legitimating philosophy'.²⁶³ Confucianism 'stresses the

²⁶² Hsu, O'Connor and Lee, 'Understandings of Death', 153–74.

²⁶³ Lin, 101.

individual's position in the social network. The life of the individual is incomplete; it derives meaning only from the coexistence of other individuals'. This explains why Monkey desperately needs validation from his tribe. To know himself, he needs to find his identity through the community. Nevertheless, identity, or the self, is not an asset a person is born with, but a result of continuous self-development. Monkey's fluctuating identity throughout the story suggests an uncertainty, an impermanence, which echoes the teaching of Taoism. Its views on demarcation and distinction are shown in the *Tao Te Ching*. The following text is an example:

Under heaven all can see beauty as beauty, only because there is ugliness.
All can know good as good only because there is evil.
Being and nonbeing produce each other.
The difficult is born in the easy.
Long is defined by short, the high by the low.
Before and after go along with each other.
So, the sage lives openly with apparent duality and paradoxical unity.
The sage can act without effort and teach without words.
Nurturing things without possessing them, he works, but not for rewards; he competes, but not for results.
When the work is done, it is forgotten.
That is why it lasts forever.²⁶⁴

According to the Taoist philosophy, to be free, one must understand imprisonment; to become wise, one must reconcile with ignorance. Monkey's choice and my adaptation's ending resonate with these ideas. Monkey was born of a rock without identity or community. In searching for a concrete identity, he finds uncertainty. Only in diminishing his self-centred identity does he find freedom and his higher state of being.

In dealing with these concepts, I am aware that the character's unusual choice at the story's resolution may not be easily understood by non-Asian readers. However, I

²⁶⁴ Dyer, 32.

find it crucial for Monkey to reflect the Three Teachings and his Chinese heritage. Without these complex attributes, the story could likely be more easily read and followed. But by examining the shortcomings of the case studies, such as Ed Young's picture book or the recent interactive games, I learned that without these philosophical aspects, the story's cultural representation would be lost. Alternatively, the story could fail as a predictable narrative with a superficial hero character.

In summary, the story development highlights my respect for the source text and its Chinese cosmology by including many events from the original work and the most important characters from the story's first seven chapters. Yet, the novel twists I add to the narrative structure and the characterisation always work to achieve universal appeal and consideration for the culturally diverse readership. These choices also reflect my culturally mixed background as an Asian artist. Having settled on the ideal narrative strategy, I then turned my attention to translating that strategy and content into visuals. The next section demonstrates my exploration of the visual design process for the adaptation, which starts with a storyboard.

4.3 Storyboard

The storyboard was developed simultaneously with the story development. Considering the complexity of time and space in the narratives, I integrated a visual framework into the storyboard to systematically indicate these in the story.

One of the main tasks to be addressed as early as the storyboard stage was clear communication of the temporal sequence of events. In each territory, events happen in the present or characters recall events from the past in flashback scenes. For instance,

the banquet in Heaven happens in the present, but during the banquet, the King of Hell's story includes flashbacks of an event that happened some time ago in Hell. The story of Monkey's origin as told by the God of the Northern Star is not a flashback of what he himself witnessed, but a story he heard of what had happened on Earth. With such complexity in time and space, it is crucial to distinguish them visually in order to give the audience a very clear sense of time. Audiences should be able to understand what is really happening in the present and what is being subjectively told through the personal stories of different characters. Thus, I developed various visual structures for the different sequences below to clearly signal time:

- Present events: Full colour, with introductory narrative text appearing on the scroll.

This scroll gives the impression of authority, which means the information is trustworthy and objective. Character dialogues are in speech balloons.

Figure 54: Example of present-time scenes in full-colour in *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

- Flashbacks in personal stories: Sepia, inside a round vignette, often without Monkey visually present. Character dialogues are in speech balloons, but the main narrative lead is the narrator's voice, appearing simultaneously at the top or bottom of the page.

Figure 57: Storyboard for the ‘capture of Monkey’ sequence in *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

Another example is Monkey’s uprising in Heaven. After his fury is triggered, Monkey breaks his chains, grows into a giant and destroys the Heavenly Palace. Rather than going into detail about his tricks and the chaos he creates, the visuals show the fire spreading across Heaven and extreme close-ups of the gods’ frightened expressions. His impact reaches its climax with the King of Heaven, Jade Emperor, desperately calling out for Buddha’s help. In other words, Monkey’s victory over the Heaven gods is not depicted by details about his actions or by the burnt-down palace, but by the fright shown on the characters’ faces. Rather than showing the angry Monkey attacking the

gods, which can be disrespectful to these iconic deities in Chinese culture, the extreme close-up shots of the Heaven gods leave the readers to imagine the unseen fight and Monkey's impact on these characters.

Figure 58: Visual suggestions of Monkey's uprising in Heaven at the end of Act 2 in *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

Another demanding task of the staging is the conversation between Monkey and Buddha, in which Buddha is not visible. For this scene, the text is emphasised and the visual is simplistic, with only one character speaking to himself. Thus, the main challenge is to create a visual dynamic that balances the text. My solution is to isolate this part as a special sequence. The stylisation breaks the visual construction of Monkey in previous scenes into highly abstract views. The graphic separation of this sequence from the rest of the book also subtly indicates that the conversation between Monkey and Buddha does not happen in real life. This sequence draws on the visual style of expressionism to convey a dreamlike, exaggerated state of mind. Also, since the scene

emphasises the text, the visuals risk becoming monotonous. Therefore, the abstract stylisation makes the conversation more dynamic by using expressive shapes for Monkey's silhouettes and speech bubbles.

Figure 59: The highly stylised sequence of Monkey's monologue with extreme contrast lighting, limited colour palette and expressive speech bubbles in *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

Fonts and speech balloons also help distinguish between scenes. For these, I took inspiration from comics. Not only are comics suitable to refer to as a sequential graphic storytelling medium, they also propose concepts that promote universal appeal in transcultural adaptation. In *Comics as a Nexus of Cultures*, Mark Berninger, Jochen Ecke and Haberkorn Gideon remark that comics, despite the national 'schools' differences, 'display a strong inherent potential for international reception, which allows them to transcend cultural boundaries easily'.²⁶⁵

Thus, in my adaptation, there are different typo treatments for texts spoken by narrators (subjective/untrustworthy) and by the author (objective). Dialogues and narration speeches also show the variety in characters' conversations, narration and monologues. In many scenes, these types of narration all appear at the same time. Therefore, typo treatment is crucial to differentiate them. For instance, in the special sequence at the beginning of act 3, the main narrative content is a dialogue between

²⁶⁵ Ecke, Haberkorn and Berninger, *Comics as a Nexus of Cultures*, 3.

Monkey and Buddha. But because Buddha is not visually present, only Monkey appears in the scene. The narrative content of this scene has to deliver the Chinese philosophical concept of Three Teachings that is crucial to the book content as well as the source text. At the same time, visual engagement with readers cannot be neglected. Therefore, the staging of the speech balloons in this scene, more than any other, is designed to visually highlight Monkey's philosophical dialogue with Buddha.

With the above direction for the storyboard visual treatment, the story was then translated into a visual flow that serves both the narrative intents and the larger research question of how to balance the cultural roots of the source text and the adaptation's global readership. Below is the full storyboard, from the prologue to the three acts and the ending.

Discussing the use of storyboard in animation, Hans Bacher posits that a storyboard's job is 'to tell the story... The storyboard breaks scenes into different shots, perspectives, the choice of the number of characters in one scene... the direction of the light, props, effects'.²⁶⁶ Junichi Hoshino and Yumi Hoshino (2001) also call the storyboard 'a classical animation tool to help the creators to organize scenes'.²⁶⁷ In my adaptation, the storyboard serves exactly the same purposes, and more. First, the storyboard translates the screenplay to specific scenes and determines the number of pages in each scene and the staging of characters and camera angles. In addition, it plans the lighting and effects to visualise the intended narrative content. Furthermore, working

²⁶⁶ Bacher, 60.

²⁶⁷ Hoshino and Hoshino, 'Intelligent Storyboard for Prototyping Animation', 96.

with a hybrid visual storytelling form of comics and animation, my adaptation combines features of animation storyboarding, such as staging and fixed aspect ratio, with the concept of page breakdown/layout in comics, including lettering, typography and the integration of speech balloons. Will Eisner refers to lettering in comics as a crucial element, which should be 'treated 'graphically' and in the service of the story, functions as an extension of the imagery. In this context it provides the mood, a narrative bridge, and the implication of sound'.²⁶⁸ Thus, my storyboard also plans for placement of the text boxes and the speech balloons.

The full storyboard is enclosed at the appendix of this thesis. With the overall narrative structure visually mapped out in the storyboard, I went on to visual exploration, which consists of colourscript, character design, colour design and background design.

4.4 Visual Development and Production Design

My illustrated e-book is a hybrid of animation, comics and picture books, with the integration of interactivity. Thus, with illustration as the primary tool, my visual development is based on the process of production design for animation. Hans Bacher, in his book *Dream Worlds: Production Design for Animation* describes the production designer as someone who

designs the movie. If necessary, he or she develops a visual style for the film, depending on the story, the target group and the budget. They translate the written script into visuals, including background- and character-styling, colour and design language. In the early stages of a new film, the Production Designer is part of the Visual Development team. This group explores all visual

²⁶⁸ Eisner, *Comics & Sequential Art*, 10.

possibilities. They do research and try to come up with as many interesting ideas as possible, while working with complete artistic freedom.²⁶⁹

Thus, exploration of different visual styles is based on the main objectives of being respectful to the Chinese cultural roots of the story yet offering universal appeal to contemporary readers. This process refers to the visual adaptations of *JTW* discussed in the case studies as well as to the cultural roots of the characters (such as the depictions of Taoist gods in Youngle Gong temple, China). The goal is to find elements that can be adapted to attract a global audience.

Overall, the visualisation of *The Song of Stone Monkey* fuses my illustration style, respect for Chinese traditions and theoretical findings from the case studies as seen in table 6. My decorative illustration style is influenced by my training in graphic design and illustration, personal interest in classic fairy tales and Victorian book illustrations such as those by Victorian illustrators present very good examples of novelty within the traditions. Most of them work with the classics, such as Grimm's fairy tales, Aesop's Fables, Andersen's fairy tales or children's classics such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan*, etc. Yet, artists such as Rackham and Dulac weaved their artistic visions and contemporary stylistic approaches into the classic tales, making those stories into story-worlds. This source of inspiration comes from my personal artistic training and has influenced my artistic approach. However, in the practice of making the adaptation, it was always kept in balance with the cultural heritage of the story. For example, my linework was influenced by Rackham's ink and pen rendering, but the overly detailed visual style is considered unsuitable for the book.

²⁶⁹ Bacher, 10.

Thus, I reference how the detailed rendering is kept in balance with washed-out background in Chinese brush paintings. Another influence that informed my artistic approach was the soft colours and loose brushwork in Vietnamese silk paintings. These influences are particularly visible in the illustrations of Earth territories in the book, such as the design of the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit, where Monkey lives. Another example of this fusion illustration style is page 51 of the book (figure 105), which features the poetic, picturesque landscape of the monastery where Monkey's master lives. The master's image is also stylised to blend into the landscape as an almost god-like figure.

In visualising the story-world of the adaptation, I also referenced the relationship between negative and positive space as well as the suggestive visual narrative language in Chinese landscape paintings (inspired by their cultural heritage), most importantly the twelfth-century painting *Along the River during the Qingming Festival* by Zhang Zeduan.²⁷⁰ This panoramic painting depicts life during the early springtime for many townspeople participating in dynamic activities. As a horizontal scroll, the painting unfolds small sections with vignettes of mini-narratives, in which all the characters are portrayed in the middle of their activities. By combining these stories, audiences can grasp an overall impression of the people's lives during that time. Paintings such as this one informed me that the format is just as important as the content and these two elements should be considered together. The visual analysis of the case studies, especially their character designs and colour choices, provided me with good

²⁷⁰ *Along the River during the Qingming Festival* (in Chinese, *Qingming Shanghe Tu*), by Song Dynasty artist Zhang Zeduan, portrays daily life during the Northern Song in Bianjing, the capital city.

examples of adaptations that convincingly blend contemporary graphic styles with local Chinese traditions. For instance, the background designs in *Uproar in Heaven* pay homage to Chinese brush paintings, yet the vibrant colours make them contemporarily relevant. Last, but not least, references to Vietnamese silk paintings such as the examples in Table 6 (drawn from my cultural background) inform my artistic approach to balancing the negative space and intricate details in the visualisation, especially in the background designs. With artistic influences from both Asian and Western cultures, from classical periods as well as contemporary art, this stylistic fusion brings visual appeal and universality to my adaptation.

	Visual references		Details
From Victorian illustration			Arthur Rackham's book illustrations in late 1800s.
From Chinese classical paintings			Ma Yuan's landscape painting <i>Dancing and Singing</i> (1160–1225), details of <i>Along the River During the Qingming Festival</i> by Zhang Zeduan (1085–1145)
From my personal illustrations			My illustrations
From case studies			Stills from <i>Uproar in Heaven</i>
From my cultural background			Vietnamese silk paintings by Nguyen Thi Tam
My visualisation of the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit, in <i>The Song of Stone Monkey</i>

Table 6: Example of visual references and influences that inform the artistic direction for *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

Colour Design and Colourscript

Hans Bacher discusses colour as the key to aiding the narrative flow and using the colourscript in the production design process, stating that ‘the colour palettes of the scenes are determined firstly by the narrative rhythm, the scene’s location in the story, and the territory where it happens’.²⁷¹ Certainly, the choice of colours in my adaptations is influenced by my own artistic style. However, it is always kept in balance with the requirements of the narrative. As Bacher puts it, the choice of colours ‘corresponds with specific events in the story, and just as there is an emotion/action curve, there should be a colour mood curve’.²⁷² Thus, after the storyboard, the narrative content is turned into a colourscript as seen in figure 60 below. The colourscript determines the moods for each scene and sequence.

²⁷¹ Bacher, 139.

Figure 60: Colourscript for the forest scenes and the Buffalo King's cave sequence in *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

Once the colourscript defines the colour palettes for each scene, more detailed colour design direction is developed to deliver the intended visual impact. For instance, figure 60 shows the mountain and forest scenes and the Buffalo King's cave. The mountains and forest reflect Earth's diversity, chaos in harmony and peace. For this reason, they are often depicted as picturesque daytime scenes in a green/blue palette with highlighted details in warm colours. The characters are dressed in neutral tones that blend into the environment, highlighting the harmony between man and nature.

Figure 61: Mountain and forest illustrations from *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

In contrast, the monsters' gathering sequence suggests tension, danger, hatred, fear, dominance and – most importantly – a cunning conspiracy. Therefore, the palette for these scenes is dark and cold, with extreme lighting cast on the characters. However, the most important character in this conspiracy is Princess Iron Fan. To highlight her beauty and cunning plan, the adaptation shows her in an elegant soft pink/red palette against the cold, dark blue tones of the other monsters and the cave.

Figure 62: Colour design for the monsters gathering sequence with Princess Iron Fan appearance in *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

The colour choices for Heaven, on the other hand, reflect the celestial bureaucracy, with a resemblance to imperial China. Thus, my colour choices are red and yellow, the two main colours used for the royal family in China. Red is also an auspicious colour in Chinese culture, which suits the mood of the gods' gathering.

Figure 63: Colour design for Heaven Palace in *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

As I explained in the storyboard section, the flashback scenes are in sepia to indicate they are in the past. However, they are not entirely monochromatic, but carry hints of colour faded into brownish sepia tones. This keeps them consistent with the rest of the colourful palettes. More importantly, it distinguishes them from the special sequence of act 3, the dialogue between Monkey and Buddha, which is rendered in an entirely monochromatic palette.

Figure 64: Flashback scenes in *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

Figure 65: Colour design for the special sequence in *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

Character Design

Similar to the colour choices, the character designs are explored with consideration of their Chinese cultural roots while aiming for contemporary global appeal. Thus, the reference framework includes how they are depicted in Chinese classical paintings, the case studies and my artistic vision.

The most important character design in the book is Monkey, who is not bound to a specific design but will be realised in the construction by each reader. However, the adaptation will also visually present a large number of characters in their own territories.

Except for Monkey, who deliberately does not belong to any group, the characters in the book can be divided into groups by territory. The inhabitants of each world should clearly contrast each other. They clearly reflect the group identity of their tribe and their world, but they should also exhibit the distinctive characteristics of their personalities, especially important characters such as the Jade Emperor, Lady Queen Mother, King of Hell and Buffalo King.

Gods and Immortals Who Live Outside Earth

These characters are deeply rooted in the Three Teachings. Their iconography needs to be respected. In *Using Monkey to Teach Religions in China*, Ryan Bradeen and Jean Johnson refer to these characters in Chinese culture as a reflection of celestial bureaucracy to ‘explain the Chinese vision of Heaven’. The Jade Emperor, who rules in Heaven, is commonly depicted wearing the same clothes as a Chinese emperor. He is served by his officials, who keep accounts, issue decrees and file papers just as their

counterparts on earth do. Their roles include everything from soldier to stable boy to advisor to the Jade Emperor himself. ‘In outward appearance, the Chinese pantheon would appear to be arranged in a highly stratified Confucian order, with ranks and proper etiquette structuring the Heavenly Bureaucracy’ (2005).²⁷³ Figure 66 is an example of these characters’ depiction as deities in figure paintings in Yongle Gong, a Taoist temple in China. In the reviewed case studies, these gods and immortals are also often portrayed as respectable authorities who represent a Confucian order.

Figure 66: Mural painting of Taoist saints in Three Taoist Saints Hall, Yongle Gong, Shanxi Province, China.

By an anonymous artist, Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368). The figure painting has an ethereal style which was passed down from Wu Daozi (AD 680–759), an artist of the Tang Dynasty.

Figure 67: Depiction of the Heaven gods in *Uproar in Heaven*.

²⁷³ Ebrey and Gregory, 313.

Figure 68: Depiction of the Heaven gods in *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang.

Figure 69: Depiction of the Heaven gods in CCTV's *Journey to the West*.

Combining the references to these characters' cultural roots and their visualisation in the case studies, my adaptation portrays them as symmetrical, structured shapes in primary colours to reflect unity and order. At the same time, their designs are stylised according to their natures and personalities, or sometimes in total contrast with their natures to highlight the contradiction. For instance, Jade Emperor and Lady Queen Mother represent the authoritarian order of Heaven in Chinese culture. In the visual references drawn from Chinese paintings and the case studies, they are often portrayed as serious, intimidating deities. In my adaptation, they are portrayed as old, rigid characters lacking empathy. In particular, table 7 demonstrates my process of taking visual references from Chinese culture and the case studies as well as contemporary illustration to come up with the visual exploration of Jade Emperor. In my adaptation, he is the King of Heaven for thousands of years. He has seen glory, dark days and chaos. Not much can excite him anymore. He is a tired-looking king who dreads uncertainty and prefers the old order, which he does not like, but needs to lean on. Another Heaven authority is Lady Queen Mother, the head of the fairies. With a tired old king, there are so many things in Heaven she needs to attend to. Thus, she is depicted as a controlling, dominant, fierce and intimidating character. She believes in the authoritarian system of Heaven and wants to preserve it in anything she controls. Her character design, accordingly, is a solid, round character with an expressive face.

	Visual references		Details
From case studies			Jade Emperor in <i>Uproar in Heaven</i> (left) and CCTV's <i>Journey to the West</i> (right)
From contemporary works			Visualisation of a Chinese emperor by artist Demi (left) and David Roberts (right)
From local Chinese traditions			Left: Jade Emperor in a Ming Dynasty ink and colour painting on silk, 16th century Right: Statue of the Jade Emperor Hangzhou Orient Culture Park
My visual exploration of Jade Emperor

Table 7: Visual references and my exploration of Jade Emperor.

Another important character in the story is Monkey's grandmaster. He is depicted as a Taoist immortal who lives beyond the karmic cycles of life and death. Yet,

he does not care for any title and thus chooses to live freely on Earth rather than among the Heaven gods. His image is godlike, yet friendly and warm like a wise old man, with colours that almost blend into the natural background.

Figure 70: Character design of Monkey's grandmaster in *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

Table 8 below explains some of the visual references and the stylistic exploration for the gods and immortals in my adaptation.

	Visual references from case studies	Characteristics	My visual exploration
Dragon King	<p>Dragon King in <i>Uproar in Heaven</i></p>	A kind man who holds neutral opinions of Monkey. Like Monkey, he belongs to Earth and is associated with the underwater world.
King of Hell	<p>King of Hell in <i>Journey to the West</i></p>	King of Hell is the head of Hell officers, who work with the records life and death. Being associated with Death, he is seen by others as a bad omen.
God of Northern Star	<p>God of Northern Star in <i>Journey to the West</i></p>	A calm, respectful character who shows the serenity of a Taoist master as well as a charisma of a Confucian scholar.
Garden God	<p>Garden God in <i>Journey to the West</i></p>	A kind old man with warm and loving nature.
General Li	<p>General Li in <i>Monkey King: The Hero is Back</i></p>	General Li is the head of the Heaven army. He is in charge of capturing Monkey. Li is fierce, powerful, and intimidating.
Nezha	<p>Nezha in <i>Monkey King: the Hero is Back</i></p>	Nezha is a protection deity in Chinese folk religion, a son to General Li and one of the main leaders of the Heaven army.
Monkey's master	<p>Master Bodhi in <i>Journey to the West</i></p>	Monkey's grandmaster is a Taoist immortal who lives outside Life and Death

Table 8: Examples of the visual references for the Heaven gods and immortals from the case studies and my stylisation in *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

Some characters display an appearance opposite to their character. For instance, Princess Iron Fan is a cunning, ruthless woman, but she has the ethereal beauty of a fairy princess. That explains why her proposal to frame Monkey easily persuades the demons, who are charmed by her enchanting beauty. Her design in my adaptation is drawn from visual references to fairies and court ladies in classical Chinese paintings, depictions of Princess Iron Fan in the case studies and the femme-fatale character common in contemporary films. The classical paintings often portray these ladies in flowy, elegant costumes, and their composure as calm and serene. On the contrary, case studies such as *Princess Iron Fan* and *Journey to the West* depict the character as cunning and ruthless. Furthermore, I referenced attractive, mysterious femme-fatale characters in contemporary films such as Megara in *Hercules*, Jessica Rabbit in *Who Censored Roger Rabbit?* and Esmeralda in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. The combination of these references from Asian as well as Western media targets both cultural traditions and universal appeal. Consequently, my visualisation of the character shows a heavenly beauty among the grotesque demons. In my adaptation, Princess Iron Fan used to be a Heaven fairy, but is now married to the Buffalo King, the head of the demons. She is cunning and vengeful, but also charming and beautiful. Her ethereal beauty so sharply contrasts her surroundings and the demons that the reader can easily see why they all listen to her and follow her plan to frame Monkey.

	Visual references	Details
From case studies		Depictions of <i>Princess Iron Fan</i> in <i>Princess Iron Fan</i> and <i>Journey to the West</i>
From contemporary works		From left to right: visualisation of Megara in <i>Hercules</i> , Jessica Rabbit in <i>Who Framed Roger Rabbit?</i> , and Esmeralda in <i>The Hunchback of Notre Dame</i>
From local Chinese traditions		Depiction of the court ladies in <i>Spring Morning in the Han Palace</i> by Ming Dynasty painter Qiu Ying (ca. 1494-1552)
My visualisation of Princess Iron Fan

Table 9: References and my visualisation of Princess Iron Fan in *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

Besides the important characters, there are characters who share group identities and characteristics such as Heaven gods, Hell officers and Heaven guards, or Heaven officers. Thus, characters of the same group present the group identity as well as a wide variety in body type, appearance and costume. For instance, in the examples below, the

Heaven gods belong to the same rigid authoritarian order of Heaven. Most of them are middle-aged or old characters, with serious, tired facial expressions. Their costumes are neat and organised. The Heaven guards also present similarities as well as variety. Similarly, Hell officers are part of the same system as Heaven gods, but they deal particularly with life and death matters only as records. Thus, they are even more serious and unapproachable than the Heaven gods. Like the other groups, Hell officers differ from each other but reflect the group identity and the territory to which they belong.

Figure 71: Character sketches and designs for the groups of Heaven gods, Hell officers, and Heaven's guards in *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

Demons and Monsters

The character designs for this group make reference to the monsters' depiction in CCTV's *Journey to the West* and *Monkey King: Hero is Back*. Aiming for universal appeal, the reference framework extends to the visual representations of the grotesque animal characters in contemporary illustrations and animations.

Figure 72: Depictions of the monsters and demons in CCTV's *Journey to the West*.

Figure 73: Depictions of the monsters and demons in *Monkey King: Hero is Back*

Figure 74: Depictions of the monsters in *Hercules* (1997).²⁷⁴

Figure 75: Ghosts and monsters from (top) Studio Ghibli's *Spirited Away* (2001)²⁷⁵ and (bottom) *Pom Poko* (1994).²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ Clements and Musker, *Hercules*, Walt Disney Pictures, USA.

²⁷⁵ Miyazaki, *Spirited Away*, Toho, Japan.

²⁷⁶ Takahata, *Pom Poko*, Tokuma Shoten, Japan.

Figure 76: My character designs for the demons and monsters in *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

From the visual references of the case studies and contemporary animations, my designs of the demons and monsters balance the grotesque look, animal forms, the variety of body shapes, colours, and personalities. Most importantly, they have to be visually consistent with the rest of the book's characters. For instance, the monsters display their animal origins. Some of them appear almost godlike, because in the story, they are gods or guardians of the animal tribes. Unlike the Heaven gods authoritarian order of Heaven, monsters belong to Earth and nature. Thus, they display more variety in facial expressions, body shapes, temperaments, and personalities, depending on their tribes. For example, the deer and elephant monsters look more gentle than the wolf and reptile ones.

Monkey

More than for all other characters, the designs of Monkey have to enhance the character's ability to transcend cultural barriers. Thus, my designs of him are drawn from his depictions in the case studies as well as his cultural heritage. Monkey is a demigod in the story, rooted in Hanuman, the beloved Indian monkey god, so his character designs depict the comical and human behaviour he represents. At the same time, my creative process considers his aspirational, godlike attributes. The cultural reference is crucial here to respect Monkey King's long history in Asian culture as well as make him a visually appealing icon that relates to a large global audience unfamiliar with him. To achieve this objective, the visual options available in the Monkey builder function should be enjoyable for readers who wish to read purely for entertainment but still satisfying to readers who know him well from the original story and the numerous past adaptations. Most importantly, his design should be visually consistent with the rest of the book.

Figure 77: Character designs of Monkey in the case studies.

From left to right, top to bottom: *Monkey King*, *Journey to the West*, *A Chinese Odyssey*, *Uproar in Heaven*, *Monkey King: A Hero is Back*, *American Born Chinese*.

One of the main challenges in making the visual assets is the consideration of visual consistency. The Monkey character design needs to be flexible with visual assets for readers to choose from but he also needs to fit into the overall design direction.

Although it is inevitable that the book will provide readers with a wide variety of visual choices, it is equally crucial to ensure that all these visual options fit the book's overall aesthetic vision. Hans Bacher refers to the variety of style and the importance of

visual consistency in animation production. He remarks that independent films are personal pieces of art expressing the personal styles of the artists. However, in large productions involving many artists, ‘to avoid a confusing mixture of different artistic handwritings, the big studios of the past decided to have one artist design the look of the film and then have the others follow’.²⁷⁷ In *Directing Animation* (2013), Tony Bancroft also emphasises the importance of design consistency in visual storytelling:

Style should be about creating a believable world that the viewer feels comfortable in and excited to explore. Consistency of design style is what holds the viewer in that world.²⁷⁸

Therefore, to engage readers, the personalisation feature of the book was designed in balance with the overall visual style and tightly connected to the narrative and the presentation of local traditions. Certainly, I cannot simulate all the possibilities of what the readers can construct to keep control of the visual consistency, but I can group these assets in specific styles with consistent elements to ensure they belong together. Most importantly, the visual assets for Monkey should provide a wide variety of graphic styles, body shapes and features, expressions and costumes. For instance, figure 78 shows an early experiment in which I explored the visual designs of Monkey in different styles and ethnic. The variety of graphic styles presents influences from Japanese Manga, Latin American graphic posters, Eastern European children’s books, German expressionism and French Comics, to connect with the cultural diversity in the readership. For example, Manga-style visual assets can resonate with Japanese or Asian

²⁷⁷ Bacher, 17.

²⁷⁸ Bancroft, *Directing for Animation*, 53.

readers who grew up with Manga. Similarly, the French comic visual style or Latin American posters can relate to European or Latin American readers respectively.

Figure 78: My early visual experiments of Monkey in various graphic styles.

Figure 79: My exploration of Monkey's visual assets.

Although the early visual exploration provided a variety of graphic styles and ethnics, I found that some of the Monkey designs were inconsistent with the overall graphic style of the book. More importantly, the specific ethnic characteristics of the designs also contradicted the hero's Chinese roots. Thus, during a later stage in the character design process, I focused less on graphic styles and ethnic-specific designs and more on variety in the character's personality, physical shapes and expressions. For instance, the sketches of Monkey's face in figure 79 present a wide range of ages (from

a young boy to a mature man), emotional expressions (cheerful, nostalgic, bitter, confused, angry) and body shapes (from short and chubby to tall and muscular). Furthermore, his costume designs also vary from traditional to modern Chinese, or even non-Chinese in some cases. With those assets, readers of different age groups and backgrounds can create their own versions of Monkey based on their interests, cultural influences and personal interpretation. For example, an adult Chinese reader who grew up watching and reading many visual adaptations of *JTW* may construct Monkey's image based on his knowledge of the character. The design can be a traditional Chinese hero that resembles what he has seen in other visual adaptations. He may choose a slender, nimble body shape with a playful, cheeky facial expression and a Chinese-inspired costume. On the contrary, an American teenager who has no background knowledge of the story or the character may choose a design similar to the superheroes he knows from Marvel or DC comics. The design, therefore, can be a muscular, serious-looking hero with a completely non-Chinese costume.

Having said that, the variety of visual assets must not contradict the overall artistic vision of respecting the character's cultural roots. Therefore, the non-Chinese assets should not interfere with the systemic unity of the visual style or the content. In other words, no matter what design the readers come up with, it has to belong to the story-world of the adaptation. Monkey's look has to blend in with the environmental designs and the other characters.

Environmental Designs

Similarly to the other visual designs, the reference framework for the environmental designs reflects both the cultural heritage of *JTW* and the universal appeal my transcultural adaptation targets. First, the designs are referenced from classical Chinese landscape paintings, notable examples among the case studies and my own artistic repertoire as an illustrator. This ensures that the designs reflect the combination of the theoretical analysis and the reference framework with the practice to answer the research questions.

Accordingly, for systematic reference and construction, I divide the story-world into three main territories: Heaven, Hell (or the underworld) and Earth. Each territory has its own unique characteristics that also reflect its inhabitants. All of these characteristics contribute to the readership's impression and judgement of the characters. Therefore, they have to be reflected in the visualisation. The designs of these territories are defined through the use of mood boards. Mood boards are an effective method to improve inspiration and communication during the design process. These mood boards are 'typically a collection of abstract media which the designer uses for personal inspiration'.²⁷⁹ Particularly, Hannes Rall discusses the use of mood boards in animation:

A mood board collects samples of existing artwork to narrow down the choice of the desired artistic style. These examples can then serve to more closely determine the artistic direction and be an important communication tool to the artists working on a project. It will give them an idea of the direction they should work towards. Of course the provided samples serve as a starting point only, to which the individual style of the concept artists is added. And transferred to the images that are needed for the adaptation project they are working on. This way

²⁷⁹ McDonagh and Storer, 'Mood Boards as a Design Catalyst', 16–31.

something new can emerge by combining influences from existing pieces with artistic innovation. Luckily, each artist's "handwriting" is entirely unique – even then recreating in a traditional style will lead to an individual piece that avoids plagiarism and simple copying.²⁸⁰

In making *The Song of Stone Monkey*, I assembled the visual references from two main sources: Chinese local traditions and the contemporary works that deliver my intended visual impact for each scene. In particular, the mood boards were used as visual reference guides to keep my work in balance between respect for Chinese traditions and visual appeal relatable to contemporary audiences.

Heaven. The home of the gods culturally reflects the Confucian structure of imperial China (explained at the beginning of this chapter), with the Jade Emperor as king. Heaven is also a fantasy dreamworld of the gods, so its visual elements portray an idealised environment where things are under control and kept in the right order. These aesthetic ideals are apparent in the depiction of the palace in the Chinese painting *Along the River during the Qingming Festival* by Zhang Zeduan (figure 80) and in the visualisation of Heaven in the notable case studies such as CCTV's *Journey to the West* (figure 81). Accordingly, Heaven's beauty is man-made – signified by intricate ornaments and decorations – rather than natural. This visual style of Heaven hints that the gods, who belong there, cannot tolerate Monkey's wild, untamed nature. Heaven reflects the authoritarian system of the gods, human beliefs and social order. Therefore, it should look concrete, structured, and orderly.

²⁸⁰ Rall, *Adaptation for Animation*, par. 4.

Figure 80: Details of *Along the River During the Qingming Festival* by Zhang Zeduan.

Figure 81: The depiction of Heaven in CCTV's *Journey to the West*.

My visual mood boards for Heaven consist of illustrations by Danish illustrator Kay Nielsen,²⁸¹ with intricate ornaments and vibrant colour palettes; works by American artist Virginia Frances Sterrett (figure 82),²⁸² and set designs from the film *Satyricon*

²⁸¹ Kay Rasmus Nielsen was a Danish illustrator, one of the key artists of the 'golden age of illustration' in the early twentieth century.

²⁸² Virginia Frances Sterrett (1900–1931) was an American artist and illustrator, also part of the 'golden age'.

(1969) by Federico Fellini (figure 83).²⁸³ Interestingly, Nielsen's illustrations of Eastern classic fairy tales, done by a Danish illustrator, bring stylistic eclecticism and cultural mix to these local stories. Therefore, the relationship between the cultural roots and the universality is apparent in his designs.

Figure 82: Mood board for the visualisation of Heaven with book illustrations by Danish illustrator Kay Nielsen and American artist Virginia Frances Sterrett.

Figure 83: Mood board for the visualisation of Heaven with set designs of the film *Satyricon* (1969) by Federico Fellini.

²⁸³ Fellini, *Satyricon*, United Artists, Italy.

Fellini's *Satyricon*, with its set designs and character costumes, also displays a dynamic contrast between the characters, the system they belong to and the system's decadence. This relates to my artistic vision of presenting Heaven as an picturesque paradise full of respected but close-minded, old, and tired gods.

Figure 84: My final design of the Heaven Palace entrance in *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

Hell. This territory is not often a focus of visual adaptations of *JTW*, considering that the sequence of Monkey and the King of Hell is not crucial to the story. However, the Chinese concept of Hell is commonly depicted as a court of justice. In *Divine Justice: Religion and the Development of Chinese Legal Culture*, Paul Katz remarks that

Hell is considered a crucial part of ‘the Chinese ideology of justice extends to the ways in which the gods control all human ... which is largely punitive or legal’ (2008).²⁸⁴

Drawing from this concept but also aiming for a novel visualisation, my adaptation portrays Hell as a part of the celestial bureaucratic structure of Heaven. To highlight the legal order and judgement, Hell is shown as a system in which its inhabitants live and work as officials, approaching life and death stoically. Hell reflects A prison headquarters, led by King of Hell, a character who tells a hateful story about Monkey. Although it appears only briefly in the flashback story of the King of Hell, Hell contributes an element of surprise. Rather than constructing a Hell of fearful monsters and punishment, I prefer to introduce a more contemporary image of Hell, one that is more relatable to global audiences. Hell is not the land of ghosts, of death, but rather an opposite image of Life, of Earth. It is the emptiness of life, of movement, and the lack of life energy. It is not a place that crushes people with torture machines and punishment, but with the monotonous, lifeless halls of concrete buildings. An adaptation that portrays the typical Chinese concept of Hell can present the Chinese cosmological picture of it, but it will likely be irrelevant to the global audience. Thus, I intend to make this short appearance of Hell surprisingly relevant to the contemporary lives of multicultural readers. It reflects postmodern fear and disillusionment, a place where hope and life are crushed not through torture but through cold, endless repetition of meaningless existence. To portray this world, I reference the film *The Trial* (1962),

²⁸⁴ Katz, *Divine Justice*, 3.

directed by Orson Welles,²⁸⁵ and the set design of *The Apartment* (1960), by Billy Wilder.²⁸⁶ Both films depict a uniform, monotonous workplace that kills creativity and hope. But to avoid alienating it from the rest of the book, I also bring in Chinese architectural references from contemporary office buildings in China that also display rigid authority. In particular, I draw inspiration from the People's Bank of China buildings in Shanghai and Beijing. Nevertheless, it is worth noting here that the visualisation is based purely my artistic vision. Readers from various backgrounds may or may not relate the territories and characters from the book to those in their own cultures and countries, but these should be considered only as personal interpretation. The book does not intend to let those concepts interfere with the storytelling.

Figure 85: Visual references from *The Apartment* (1960) and *The Trial* (1962).

²⁸⁵ Welles, *The Trial*, Astor Pictures Corporation, USA.

²⁸⁶ Wilder, *The Apartment*, United Artists, USA.

Figure 86: People's Bank of China headquarters in Beijing and The Bank of China building in Shanghai.

Figure 87: My visualisation of Hell in *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

Earth. In contrast, Earth is more complex than the other two territories, as it consists of many living spaces and species. Most importantly, Earth showcases contrasting territories, where many short stories are told by different characters. The

visual styles vary from one territory to the next, from the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit (where the Monkey tribe lives) to the Buffalo King's cave (where the monsters and demons gather) and the Dragon Sea (the underwater world where the Dragon King lives). Earth reflects the variety of the natural world with its unpolished organic beauty and contrasting sides. It also reflects the various facets of Monkey, who comes from Earth and belongs to Earth. The visual reference for Earth is drawn from the designs of the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit from the case study *Uproar in Heaven*, classical Chinese landscape paintings such as shown in figure 88 that depict harmony between man and nature, and contemporary illustrations that fit under the same theme as presented in figure 89. In addition, my graphic style is influenced by both my Asian roots and my visual arts practice in Western countries. Although the visual style is personal, its cross-cultural influence allows for both local traditions and global appeal in transcultural adaptation.

Figure 88: Detail of Shitao's painting *Outing to Zhang Gong's Grotto* (1642–1707) as visual reference.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁷ Shitao, *Outing to Zhang Gong's Grotto*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 89: Visual references from contemporary artists Manabu Ikeda²⁸⁸ (top right) and Maki Ohkojima.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁸ Japanese artist Manabu Ikeda is known for his large-scale, fantastical, highly detailed pen and ink paintings.

²⁸⁹ Maki Ohkojima is a painter. Born in Tokyo, she strives to take in views of nature – birds and forest.

Figure 90: The final designs of the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit in *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

For instance, figure 90 showcases an array of natural elements in organic forms. The territory reflects both Monkey's character and Earth's diversity. The scene is therefore full of whimsical details. On the contrary, the design for the Buffalo King's Cave presents an intimidating, dark, crooked, fearful ambience. It shows a darker side of Earth, where the monsters frame a conspiracy to harm Monkey. For this particular scene, I reference expressionism with its strong, contrasting shapes and intense colours and with the characters under extreme lighting. I also ascribe the fearful depiction of dark forces to animation such as Night on Bald Mountain from *Fantasia* (1940),²⁹⁰ Hades' place in Disney's *Hercules* (1997) and the grotesque designs of Robert Wiene's

²⁹⁰ Jackson, Luske and Algar, *Fantasia*, Walt Disney Productions, USA.

thriller *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920).²⁹¹ They all depict a strong dynamic contrast of movements, light and darkness that centralise the main character, which is also my vision for the Buffalo King and his world.

Figure 91: A mood board for the visualisation of Buffalo King's cave. Kay Nielsen's designs for the 'Night on Bald Mountain' sequence from *Fantasia* (1940) and Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920)

Figure 92: The visualisation of Buffalo King's cave in *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

²⁹¹ Wiene, *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, Decla-Bioscop, Poland.

The underwater world where the Dragon King lives is also on Earth. This underwater world is a peaceful, neutral, welcoming place with richly coloured sea creatures and plants. The mood boards consist of a wide variety of twentieth- and twenty-first-century book illustrations and animations depicting the underwater world (figure 93 and 94). They are chosen for their highly decorative illustration style and vibrant colour palettes. Most importantly, these works demonstrate that the content focus on the characters, but their surroundings is most crucial in building the story-worlds of the stories.

Figure 93: A mood board for the visualisation of the Sea Dragon Palace with Underwater scenes from *Song of the Sea* (2014).²⁹²

²⁹² Moore, *Song of the Sea*, StudioCanal, Ireland.

Figure 94: A mood board for the visualisation of the Sea Dragon Palace Illustrations by Czech illustrator Jiří Trnka for Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* (1959).²⁹³

²⁹³ Andersen and Trnka, *Fairy Tales*, Hamlyn Publishing Group Ltd.

The visual exploration process demonstrates that the final designs of the adaptation are influenced by the two main sources: (1) the depictions of the subjects in Chinese paintings and in the examined case studies and (2) the graphic styles of contemporary artists in film, animation and illustration. Together with my own artistic style, the designs reflect an alignment of cultural heritage and universal appeal that answers the research questions. The visual design process for my transcultural adaptation also reflects the broader reference framework for visual adaptations of local classics. For example, besides the visual references from the past visual adaptations and the local roots of the source text, the visual development also makes use of contemporary graphic styles to develop the character designs, mood boards and background. This brings me back to the chosen storytelling medium. In reviewing this process as part of a wider visual narrative for the transcultural adaptation context, what innovations can illustrated e-books offer?

4.5 Employing Illustrated E-Books as a Medium

In making *The Song of Stone Monkey*, I engaged with both of the digital image-making methods, comics and picture books, that I have been familiar with during my practice as an illustrator and with new experiments that involve limited animation. The next sections present the most important aspects of my findings during the process, which can be applied to independent works of illustration, digital animation, picture books, and most directly, to illustrated e-books. These findings suggest a particular approach to using digital tools and visual designs in illustrated e-books. Consequently,

they together answer my last research question of how to apply these digital tools to construct a multi-dimensional reading experience for transcultural adaptations.

Breaking Out of the Book Page

Printed books often come with the restrictions of the book page format. Book designers must always work within these limitations, and that certainly affects their creative process. For instance, in making the printed book below, I had to work within the book size of 300 mm × 275 mm. Therefore, the inside pages are either the same size for single-page illustrations or 570 mm × 260 mm for spreads. This is often how printed book illustrations are planned. However, since this is an interactive book with a few extended spreads, it has an extended panoramic page which is 1140 mm × 260 mm. Nevertheless, the format of the panoramic page is still limited to four times the length of the closed book size. Also, the costly production of such extended pages inside printed books or printed interactive books ensures they are not very common.

Figure 95: Examples of my illustrations in *Le Monde Magique du Père Noël* (2015) as single page illustrations, spreads and an extended paronamic spread.²⁹⁴

²⁹⁴ Bacon and Tran, *Le Monde Magique Du Père Noël*, Les Éditions Transcontinental.

Despite the definite aspect ratio (in terms of proportion) required by the screen, the animation and interactive properties of illustrated e-books allow extension of the book page in all four directions: By dragging, panning and scrolling vertically or horizontally, readers can bring portions of the book page into view that are created in a different format or expanded beyond the screen space. Still, even for these portions it is certainly useful to consider the aspect ratio of the screen to arrive at the correct resolution and keep the same height for the horizontal pan or the same width for the vertical scroll. Furthermore, illustrated e-books are often designed to be read on different reading devices and platforms with different screen sizes and resolutions. For example, an illustrated e-book made for Android platforms requires a resolution high enough to be read on the latest models of mobile reading devices, such as the Samsung Galaxy S9 (2220×1080 pixels) or Sony Xperia XA3 (1080×2160 pixels). Ideally, the book should be able to accommodate a resolution of 1440×2560 pixels (2K) as well as the lower screen resolutions: 480×320 pixels, 960×540 pixels, 480×854 pixels and 320×240 pixels. Similarly, illustrated e-books developed for iOS platforms should fit the highest resolution of the 12.9-inch iPad pro (2732×2048 pixels) as well as older model iPhones such as the iPhone 6s (750×1334 pixels). Thus, I employed the highest resolution of the currently available screen sizes, which is the 12.9 iPad pro. The adaptation, therefore, is formatted as 2732×2048 pixels.

However, unlike those in printed books, pages in an illustrated e-book do not have to be restricted by the screen size. Instead, they can be created in a format larger than the screen resolution. As I described, the page can be extended depending on the reading experience predetermined by the book designer or the reader's interactions

(dragging and panning). In my adaptation, this feature well suits visualisation of panoramic landscapes in which readers can pan left or right to see the whole illustration. The feature is not only more visually engaging than a static landscape illustration, but also mimics the cinematic experience of unfolding a Chinese scroll painting (figure 96), which connects my contemporary artwork to Chinese traditions. For instance, in figure 97, the entire illustration of the Five-Fingered Mountain is revealed only in sections as the reader pans left or right. This demonstrates how the medium of illustrated e-books, as a hybrid of picture books and animation, offers both the traditional book-reading experience and the cinematic impact of camera movement.

Figure 96: Unfolding and viewing a Chinese scroll painting (2017).²⁹⁵

²⁹⁵ 'Owned by an Emperor', Christie's, 2017.

Figure 97: The Five-Fingered Mountain in *The Song of Stone Monkey*, viewed on a 12.9-inch iPad Pro.

These pages were created as extremely wide illustrations. Once they are added to the illustrated e-book, the viewer cannot see the whole illustration at once, but must pan up and down or left and right to see all parts of it. This is, in fact, very similar to background painting in animation. For example, figure 98 below shows two background paintings for Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* (1959).²⁹⁶ These backgrounds are never seen fully on-screen, but only as an animatic in panning movement.

Figure 98: Background paintings in *Sleeping Beauty* (1959).

Similarly, one of the ending pages below from *The Song of Stone Monkey* is a panoramic page which shows the whole forest with the Five-Fingered Mountain. When the reader turns to this page, the illustration appears as an animatic, panning from left to right. Once it stops, readers can use their fingers to pan left and right as they wish. However, the illustration is never viewed as a whole.

²⁹⁶ Geronimi, *Sleeping Beauty*, Buena Vista Distribution, USA.

Figure 99: The panoramic illustration of the Five-Fingered Mountain from *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

A panoramic format such as the one in figure 99 can create the impression of open vastness that suits the picturesque nature scenes. Another potential application is the seamless scrolling format shown in figure 100. This illustration was created in a wide format with the left and right edges seamlessly joined. Therefore, when readers scroll horizontally, they can get the feeling of being trapped inside the space, which is suitable for interior scenes with dark moods. Thus, following this approach, I created the scene of Hell as a monotonous office full of records and paperwork. Scrolling left and right across this scene gives the readers the feeling of being trapped inside without a way out.

Figure 100: Hell and the Hell officers illustration from *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

(To view the full illustration in its intended format, please refer to the digital video simulation accompanying this thesis.)

Although examples such as the above illustrations require careful planning at the beginning, they can offer readers an engaging reading experience which printed books with still illustrations cannot achieve.

Smart Objects and Layers

To represent the Chinese cosmology presented in *JTW* to digital readers, the adaptation requires digital imaging tools that accommodate the highly detailed visualisation of the story-worlds of Earth, Heaven and Hell. This visualisation is based on my vision and style as well as artistic references that emerged from my theoretical research. For instance, the landscape scenes on Earth are inspired by classical Chinese landscape paintings which depict the contrast between the negative space and the highly detailed trees and plants. Thus, *The Song of Stone Monkey* consists of complex illustrations with intricate details that are repeated from page to page. The question is how to recreate them on multiple pages without being repetitive.

Addressing that issue, I broke the landscape scenes into multiple layers and elements. For example, in the Earth scenes, the landscape was broken down into groups: background layers which consist of mountains and sky, middle ground layers of plants and trees, and foreground layers of close-up plants. These elements were created individually as single clip-art pieces and then used in various arrangements for all the Earth scenes.

In my practice as an illustrator, I have worked extensively with digital image-making software such as Adobe Creative Suite²⁹⁷ and ProCreate.²⁹⁸ In particular, Adobe Photoshop is still one of the industry's top digital imaging tools. My most common application of Photoshop is for digital colouring, which is done on top of the hand-drawn illustration. Photoshop layers are very useful for specific editing. Layers allow digital artists to work on specific objects or areas without affecting the whole work. For example, to colour the hand-drawn illustration of the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit, I created three different sets of layers: background, character and foreground elements. This method gave me the flexibility to edit these groups individually, with one on top of another. The editing was therefore also much easier to control at any stage of the colouring.

In complex book projects such as *The Song of Stone Monkey*, Adobe Photoshop²⁹⁹ is largely effective for colouring because it lets the digital artist work on individual objects as layers. It also allows the multiplication of visual elements as 'smart objects'. This brings us back to one of the main concerns in working with digital images, image resolution. A wrong image resolution can result in pixelated or blurry images. Usually, when a visual element created in Photoshop is scaled down and then scaled up again, it becomes pixelated (figure 101).

²⁹⁷ Adobe Creative Suite is a now-discontinued software suite of graphic design, video editing and web development applications developed by Adobe Systems.

²⁹⁸ Procreate® is an intuitive digital illustration app for iPad.

²⁹⁹ Adobe Photoshop is a graphics editor developed and published by Adobe Inc. for MacOS and Windows, created in 1988 by Thomas and John Knoll.

Figure 101: The pixelisation in scaling an object, with and without converting it to a smart object.

In addition, when a group of elements in Photoshop is merged into one layer, unless the ‘history’ is used to retrieve the file’s previous stage, these elements cannot be separated.

To deal with these technical demands, I engaged with ‘smart objects’. Photoshop has a special feature that allows conversion of a layer or group of layers into smart objects, turning any visual element or group of elements into clip art (with or without backgrounds) without losing the original resolution. Basically, a smart object appears as a single layer within the Photoshop file. However, it can consist of one layer/object or a group of objects in itself. Smart objects can be scaled up and down effortlessly. Unless the scaling exceeds their original resolutions, pixelisation does not occur. They are reproductive in visually complex illustrations of my book, in which I need to duplicate many elements within one scene, or reproduce them in other scenes at many different scales. For example, in the illustration below, all the elements are smart objects. Therefore, I created only eight to ten trees in various designs and then duplicated them to construct a forest background.

Figure 102: Tree designs created as individual smart objects.

Figure 103: Tree designs used in the final design of *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

Tree designs created as individual elements are then used as duplicated smart objects in the final illustration.

Similarly, the flowers, clouds, rocks and grass were made individually and then multiplied to create various scenes. I also duplicated these elements on the pages below.

Figure 104: Page 1 from *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

Figure 105: Page 51 from *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

Figure 106: Page 192 from *The Song of Stone Monkey*.

Trees, rocks and clouds are created as smart objects in one illustration and then reused in other pages.

This method sped up my production and at the same time supported the visual consistency of similar pages, especially those depicting the same territory. The example of trees, rocks, and clouds in figure 104, 105, and 106 are for Earth.

Sharing the same concepts, animatic scenes make use of Adobe After Effects to animate these smart objects as loops in separated layers. They can be duplicated, edited individually or scaled up and down easily. Like the page extension feature presented above, grouping and converting visual elements also requires proper planning at the beginning. Most of the elements have to be created individually and then combined in the layout.

Limited Animation and Sound

Limited Animation

In making my adaptation, I experimented with limited animation for two main purposes. First, animation can enhance visual engagement with a transcultural adaptation by offering readers a reading experience that cannot be achieved with printed books. More importantly, limited animation combined with interactivity allows readers to see their personalised image of Monkey played out in animatics. This feature creates

a game-like experience and brings a classic local hero close to the culturally diverse audience who might have no background information about him. As I mentioned in the introduction, the visualisation does not aim for hyperrealism. Instead, the illustrations and limited animation of the book aim to suggest, not describe. Since all the visual elements of each book pages are separated in layers, they can be animated individually as still objects or loops. Therefore, the pages with limited animation can be composed and edited efficiently in almost all the popular digital programs for animation and visual effects, such as Adobe After Effects³⁰⁰ and Adobe Flash.³⁰¹ In my practice, I worked with Adobe After Effects, but the result can be achieved using other similar software.

Sound

Considering that the book content should stand by itself without sound, I do not include sound in my research scope. Illustrated e-books, like games, can be read and played anywhere. Adding sound requires access to a sound system, which may not be available to all readers. Thus, the readers should be able to read effortlessly without sound. This lack of sound should not interfere with their reading experience.

³⁰⁰ Adobe After Effects is a digital visual effects, motion graphics and compositing application developed by Adobe Systems and used in the post-production process of filmmaking and television production.

³⁰¹ Adobe Flash Player is computer software for using content created on the Adobe Flash platform, including viewing multimedia contents, executing rich Internet applications and streaming audio and video.

Hyperlinks and the Open Resource

Extra References and Resources

Elements within the book page can be turned into hyperlinks on which readers can click to visit external websites in their device's browser. This feature is a helpful way to provide extra resources relevant to the book content without having to add the information into the book. For instance, on the book page where the Jade Emperor appears, there is a button next to him with his name on it. There is not much space for the book to fully present him, but readers can click on this button to visit a trusted website that explains who he is and what he represents in Chinese culture. Similarly, they can click on other characters' names to learn more about the Chinese cosmology. The story can be read and enjoyed without this information. However, it empowers readers who are unfamiliar with Chinese culture to learn more about it if they want to.

Figure 107: A sample of a hyperlink added to the character's name to link the reader to a resource on the internet when clicked.

Sharing and Readers' Community

In addition to the informative hyperlinks, one of the features the book incorporates is 'sharing'. Once readers finish the book, they can choose to share it and their feedback on their social network accounts and blogs such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr or BlogSpot. Although this feature does not enhance the reading experience, it is an effective way to generate paratexts through feedback, reviews and conversation among the global readership.

Figure 108: A sample of sharing options once readers finish reading the book.

Although the above aspects are just a few examples of what the medium can provide to visual storytellers, they also illustrate how digital tools can be used together to enhance the impact of sequential graphic storytelling. Within my research, they help answer the question of how interactivity can help transcend cultural barriers in transcultural adaptations. Within the larger context of digital narratives, the medium of illustrated e-books expands our understanding of storytelling, in particular, the relationship between the local identity of the story and the diversity of its readers.

4.6 Reflection

In summary, maintaining the proper balance between global appeal and local tradition has been the fundamental challenge in adapting *JTW* for the digital readership. During my practice, this lay at the heart of the story development as well as the stylistic choices. Thus, by suggesting ways to address this challenge, my study lays the necessary groundwork to examine and develop the potential of illustrated e-books.

In *Artistic research: Theories, methods and practices*, Hannula, Suoranta, and Vadén propose that

[Artistic research is] about the self-reflective and self-critical processes of a person taking part in the production of meaning within contemporary art, and in such a fashion that it communicates where it is coming from, where it stands at this precise moment, and where it wants to go.³⁰²

Throughout my study, I have engaged with theoretical discussions through the case studies analysis as well as through the creative practice of making my own adaptation of *JTW*. My dialogue between theory and practice sheds light to the two main research questions:

- How can the story of *JTW* be brought to a global audience while honouring its cultural background and origin through the use of illustrated e-books?
- How can the negotiation between global appeal and local traditions help define parameters for visual adaptations?

To address the first question, I have demonstrated that an illustrated e-book can be used to explore the capacity of interactive narratives for transcultural adaptation.

³⁰² Hannula, Suoranta, & Vadén, *Artistic research: Theories, methods and practices*, 10.

Combining digital illustrations and interactivity, the medium presents great potential for adapting local classics. I presented an analysis framework to analyse visual case studies of *JTW* as well as the process of applying these findings to my own adaptation. In addition, I have provided a detailed study of a local classic examined through adaptation studies and its potential for transcultural adaptation. Through the carefully documented process of my practical work, including narrative strategy experiments and story development, I have shown how interactivity can be used as part of the visual language of illustrated e-books. Finally, I have explored the technical aspects and demonstrated insight into the use of digital illustration and its advantages over printed media.

To address the second question, my practical work development experimented with narrative strategy as well as visualisation in adapting *JTW*. Compared with the digital adaptations of *JTW* in the realm of illustrated e-books or interactive media that my research examined, *The Song of Stone Monkey* presents a much clearer dialogue between local cultural heritage and global appeal. While other digital interactive adaptations present unique approaches to visualising the character Monkey, my adaptation further articulates the main hero character to involve the participation of the readers. It invites the readers to visualise the hero based on their interpretations of given narrative puzzles and visual assets. In this approach, the storytelling is incomplete without reader participation. However, my approach ensures the cultural aspects of the story are maintained. Firstly, reader participation is crucial but only affects the ‘telling’, the visualisation of the story. The narrative itself remains unaltered. Secondly, while providing personalisation options for the character Monkey, I maintain the relevant cultural heritage aspects by designing all of the visual assets used to construct the

character. Furthermore, this balance between giving freedom of choice and controlling the visual assets also helps retain the aesthetic unity of the adaptation.

Regarding my ongoing research in digital narrative and illustration, this study made me re-orient my practice in the current state of the art. It blended my interdisciplinary skills and knowledge from painting, publication, animation and visual communication. It challenged my limited concept of narrative as a one-way storyteller–audience process. In the digital age, in which participatory culture becomes part of digital citizens’ daily life, works of art made for this culturally diverse audience are not created only by the storytellers. They evolve with the contributions of the audience. My research background and literature review have presented scholarly discussions of this phenomenon. But it was only through the direct experience of making the adaptation that I gained specific insight to consider the readership’s involvement in the storytelling. It is fair to say that this was a crucial part of the practical work development.

Regarding my practice as an illustrator and storyteller, the study helped re-evaluate my artistic approach, especially in dealing with culturally specific stories. It challenged me to balance my artistic visions with the readership’s interests. Furthermore, it required me to expand my artistic repertoire with new digital illustration techniques. The particular findings of newly available digital illustration outputs, such as 360 illustration, limited animation and moveable clip art, all demanded careful initial planning in the making. I have been applying these methods in my professional practice and find them indeed effective.

Furthermore, both the theoretical discussion and the practical work development suggest the following directions for my future research and practice:

- Documentation of the making of the adaptation: The making of *The Song of Stone Monkey* has been thoroughly documented. This thesis has presented the most important elements of the process, but there are other aspects the report cannot cover. These materials can be compiled into a more detailed journal, including more explanation of the chosen design choices. Such documentation would benefit practicing artists in the relevant fields and presents a possibility for future publication.
- Future development of research and practice: For my own future practice, the hypothesis and insights from this study can be taken further into postdoctoral research. In addition, they suggest next steps for my professional practice, in which the adaptation will be incorporated into an app available for download on the internet. Then, it would be feasible to evaluate the book's engagement with a culturally diverse readership, an enquiry that has been limited during this study.
- Sound: In making *The Song of Stone Monkey*, I chose to overlook the option of adding sound for the specific reasons mentioned previously. But in the future development of the book into an app, aspects of sound could be explored to experiment with reader engagement.
- Reception studies: As stated in chapter 1, the scope of this study excludes reception studies. This, however, is a relevant arena to examine. The result of this study also suggests that reception studies could be a key area for postdoctoral research.
- Commercial potential of illustrated e-books as a commodity: This thesis has presented many aspects of illustrated e-books that can be considered commercially

valuable. For example, their accessibility, the internet market, available self-publishing platforms, paratexts, etc. Yet, since the main focus of this study is the artistic capacity of illustrated e-books, those market-related features of the medium are touched upon only to inform the background of the research rather than parts of the discussion. However, they suggest future study to explore the medium's potentials.

- Diversity of the visual assets: The visual development of *The Song of Stone Monkey* demonstrated diversity in the designs of Monkey. The visual assets of Monkey show a variety of body shapes and stylisation and suggest different personalities and ethnic groups. However, they are still not as diverse as the book can provide. In later steps of developing the book into an app, more visual variety and assets can be added to suggest further diversity, including in age, ethnicity and even gender. For instance, some designs can depict a female Monkey.

Attention to the above areas of enquiry will contribute further to the developing discourse surrounding adaptation studies, illustration research and increased recognition of transcultural adaptation practises. This will benefit not only practicing illustrators, but also local artists and independent authors searching for a capable visual medium to present their stories to a diverse digital readership.

4.7 Conclusion

In framing the conclusions of this practice, I find a dialogue between my theoretical discussion of the case studies and the methods I chose to make my own adaptation. From this perspective, I consider the cultural heritage of *JTW* as well as the

best way to represent those cultural roots in a modern adaptation. Moreover, I aim to answer the main challenges listed at the beginning of this chapter. First, the practice includes the use of a reference framework of classical Chinese paintings and case studies, integrating their visual aesthetic achievements into my colour design, environmental designs and characterisation. Second, the process makes use of my professional practice and influences as an illustrator who has lived and worked in both Asian and Western countries. With these two aspects, my illustrated e-book aims to promote both the local tradition of the source text and the universal appeal to which the culturally diverse audience can relate.

Similarly, the medium of illustrated e-books has been an effective tool to negotiate the local and the global components of my adaptation. With its ability to hybridise illustration, animation and picture-book techniques with optional interactivity, the medium provided me many possibilities to construct a complex narrative in a way that cannot be done with a single medium.

Digital narratives can now be seen everywhere, from trans-media franchises and blockbusters to independent storytellers, social networks and multimedia artists. Using the latest technologies for storytelling is an apparent tendency in today's small-scale independent works. Yet, do we use digital tools only because they are accessible and cost-effective? How can we use digital tools to reconcile universality with cultural roots in transcultural storytelling? How can we integrate audience interactivity as a narrative tool to transcend cultural barriers? The answer lies in how we use the medium as an artistic device that offers the audience a multidimensional narrative experience they cannot get from nondigital media.

This chapter has discussed my own findings and methods in working with illustrated e-books. I find that the most important factor in the medium is not what the medium can offer to my storytelling but how its capacity can be employed effectively in the local/global negotiation of transcultural adaptation. Although visual adaptations of *JTW* have been prolific from Asia to the West, I approach the source text as an Asian artist with mixed cultural influences and offer alternative angles to interpret the story. The creative twists in the narrative and characters are my personal artistic visions. Nevertheless, they are driven by consideration for the contemporary readership, today's social context, the universality of the character and most importantly, the Asian heritage of the source text.

Focusing on the balance between universal appeal and local tradition in transcultural adaptation, one of my practical efforts has been to experiment with cultural representation through illustration, limited animation and reader interaction. The results can be examined in two places: the first is the book's visualisation, which is drawn from references to *JTW*'s past adaptations, traditional Chinese art and contemporary illustration; the second is the visual assets of the character Monkey in a wide variety of styles. Moreover, in the story development of *The Song of Stone Monkey*, I engage with the archetypal narrative pattern of the hero's double journey while experimenting with a metonymic structure that leaves space for readers' diverse interpretations. This approach to the adaptation proves my hypothesis that illustrated e-books are an ideal way to negotiate local traditions and universal appeal in transcultural adaptation. My practical work can then be realised as a complete digital application that can be downloaded, read and played on mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets.

In adapting the Chinese classic *Journey to the West* using an illustrated e-book, I also realised the timeless appeal of myths and classic literature. In the final chapter, I reflect on my research and examine the prospects of transcultural adaptation and illustrated e-books. Building on the knowledge and practical results of this research, I also call for further exploration of the capacity of the medium and its potential for retelling local classics and becoming a space for cultural exchange.

Chapter 5

Retelling Legends and Beyond

5.1 Summary

My research has been an enquiry into the parameters of successful visual adaptation. With the Chinese classic *Journey to the West* as the source text, my research examines the relationship between universality and local traditions in transcultural adaptation, and the potential of illustrated e-books as a narrative tool in that relationship. By doing so, this thesis contributes to the fields of visual storytelling and adaptation studies. It reconsiders the balance between local traditions and global appeal in transcultural adaptation. To accomplish this, I explore these two opposing tendencies in the most notable visual adaptations of *JTW*. Findings from the comparative analysis of these works then inform my own presentation of culture and universality in my adaptation.

With regard to my practice, by portraying the Monkey King as a classic Chinese fairy-tale hero with a modern man's inner turmoil, the adaptation stays true to the source text's local tradition while transcending the character's cultural boundaries. This balance between locally rooted and globally relatable traits in the hero character aligns with the project's research aim of universality.

A number of original findings are presented in the theoretical discussion and practice. Chapter 2 is an overview of the state of the art, locating transcultural adaptations within the rapidly changing context of digital books and the growing global

audience. I also point out the importance of cultural preservation in the context of globalisation, in particular, how local traditions can work in tandem with universality in storytelling to serve multicultural audiences. More importantly, my research discusses how this negotiation can be approached through transcultural adaptations of classic literature. In addition, the overview of recent changes in visual adaptations of the classics shows the role of independent, small-scale local enterprises. The potential of illustrated e-books is introduced with its links to traditional narrative types such as linear and nonlinear narratives and visual media such as film, animation, comics and games. From there, I recommend an investigation and practice of one exemplary piece of classic literature, the Chinese novel *JTW* and its universal themes. I then suggest a comparative study of past visual adaptations of *JTW* in the above media. Chapter 3 describes the comparative analysis of the chosen case studies and confirms the importance of the balance between universal appeal and local heritage in visual adaptations. From there, the comparative discussion of the case studies proposes the combination of linear and nonlinear narrative in my own adaptation of the story. In the visual analysis of the chosen works, a number of practical problems are identified, so the fourth chapter then demonstrates the making of my own digital book adaptation, *The Song of Stone Monkey*, with highlighted issues and challenges in practice. The practice is explored in consideration with the theoretical findings while aiming for balance between universal appeal to the digital audience and faithfulness to the local heritage of the source text.

Working with a new form of narrative art, my research examines tensions between the storyteller's authorship and the reader's participation, which has been neglected in academic discussions of digital interactivity. Particularly, in transcultural

adaptations, the tension between storytellers and readers involves the ‘systemic unity’ of the narratives as well as the cultural authenticity. My research explores how traditions are preserved through authorship while interactivity and reader participation can reflect universal appeal.

Additional findings are reflected in my approach to integrating the comparative analysis in theory into the making of practice. The visual comparative analysis of the case studies and the creative exploration of making my own adaptation support and evaluate each other. My practical work and comparative analysis testify to the soundness of my approach of using a digital narrative medium to retell a classic local story. This process can be adopted by independent storytellers and visual artists. In my case studies analysis, I engage the content, context and aesthetic achievements to acknowledge the significance as well as the shortcomings of each work. These aspects are considered in relation to the source text, the audience reception, and the adaptation’s ability to reach beyond Chinese readership. In the making of my own adaptation, I use these findings in conjunction with the references from traditional Chinese paintings to form a solid cultural foundation. Concurrently, the practice also reemphasises the hypothesis discussed during the case studies and the context overview. This cyclic process of theory and practice is proven practical during my thesis and is applicable to similar studies. This process also demonstrates how theoretical findings can inform practice in visual art research.

Additionally, my direct experience as an Asian artist who has lived and worked in various Western countries may infuse this research with unique insight. Because it draws on my own heritage as well as my personal engagement with different cultures, I

hope this thesis also demonstrates how local identity and transcultural influences are intrinsically relevant to creative and intellectual activities.

Finally, my study could be used as an exemplary model that contributes towards establishing parameters for transcultural adaptation in illustrated e-books.

5.2 Future Research

The goal of my study has been to examine the parameters of a successful visual adaptation and the role of illustrated e-books as a narrative medium that can transcend cultural barriers in local classics such as *JTW*. The four chapters of this thesis and my own adaptation of *JTW* reveal and emphasise that a transcultural adaptation, while acting as a globalising agent in storytelling, cannot be separated from its cultural roots.

In contextualising the nature of the transcultural adaptations and investigating the significance of the selected visual adaptations of *JTW* from the 1940s to the 2010s, my discussion focusses on three criteria: (1) the variety of styles and genres, (2) the conversation between the adaptation and the source text (the fidelity factor), and (3), the highlights of Chinese heritage as well as the relevance to their intended audiences. The first factor concerns different media in visual storytelling such as animation, film, comics, illustrated books and digital games, on which illustrated e-books are based. The second emphasises the importance of the fidelity factor in adaptations and proposes that an adaptation must indeed pay respect to the original text, aiming for both familiarity and novelty. The last shows gaps in aesthetic quality as well as cultural representation in the chosen works. This observation concludes that while transcultural adaptations may serve wildly different audiences, they all share the same underlying theme: the

blend of the local culture's heritage with contemporary content appealing to their audiences.

In realising this hybrid between fidelity and novelty, text and image, local heritage and universal appeal, I chose illustrated e-books as the medium for my practice. Accessible by anyone with an internet connection from anywhere in the world, it catches the growing trend in digital publishing and storytelling. By integrating interactivity and limited animation, it can create an immersive reading experience which cannot be achieved using non-digital books. Moreover, the medium proves itself artistically capable as well as efficient to produce. My research proposes that these qualities make the medium suitable for local authors and storytellers to express their local identities in the global storytelling context. Besides exemplifying my own practice, my thesis calls for further investigation and exploration of illustrated e-books as an effective narrative medium, especially for the retelling of local classics.

The relational framework between digital image-making techniques and cultural aesthetic references informed my practice during the making of *The Song of Stone Monkey*. As a result, a multi-layered visual construction emerges in which all the possible layers (background, foreground, characters, colouring) are created individually to provide flexibility in editing. This is presented in the theoretical discussions in this thesis and is expressed through my practice. However, gaining a deeper understanding of the visual editing capability of the medium would require further investigation into the technical development of illustrated e-books as apps for mobile reading devices.

My research acknowledges interactivity as a significant characteristic of illustrated e-books and interactive games. It suggests that the significance of illustrated

e-books is centred in its adoption of sequential graphic storytelling media and digital interactivity to become a mediated cinematic form, which blurs the boundaries between visual storytelling forms. However, the addition of interactivity also increases the tension between the author's intention and the audience's engagement in transcultural adaptations. In the experiments with my own adaptation, I proposed to limit the interactivity to the visual presentation of the story, with no effect on the narrative contents. However, this solution also risked compromising visual consistency. Thus, the dialogue between the storyteller as the creative force and the viewer as the active consumer called for further research and creative effort to provide new solutions to this tension.

5.3 Retelling Legends and Beyond

In discussing the importance of preserving local traditions in transcultural adaptations of local classics, the context review discovered a challenge of using digital media: how can the adaptations use digital interactivity to engage with readers without losing the narrative's unity and cultural representation? My research aimed to test the hypothesis that illustrated e-books can hybridise different visual storytelling genres such as comics, picture books, animation and games to provide a one-of-a-kind interactive reading experience without losing the narrative's cohesiveness. Therefore, it can ensure that the cultural identity is not diluted through reader interaction. Considering its potential cultural impact and trans-medial storytelling capability, I proposed its relevance to visual narrative studies. The medium of illustrated e-books offers the opportunity to create a visual novel that blends animation with traditional books and

comics (in its ability to marry text and image), still illustrations and limited animations. In addition, its ability to integrate interactivity and reader participation can accommodate complex narratives, artistically distinctive visualisation, animation techniques, characterisation and sophisticated themes. Therefore, it is scalable, able to accommodate a simple children's bedtime story as well as an epic-scale work with complex themes and characters such as those of classic literature.

Such capability of illustrated e-books can help independent storytellers reach the global digital audience. Drawing the line between this medium and adaptations of classic literature, we see tremendous potential for storytelling, heritage presentation and cultural transmission. Thus, the wider implication for this hypothesis is that transcultural adaptations represent an inevitable trend in the context of globalisation. As the dominance of convergent media franchises grows, the local classics continue to be cultivated through contemporary adaptations. Grounded in independent creative work rather than relying on extensive productions, illustrated e-books is one of the storytelling mediums that can embrace this trend and answer the production challenges of local enterprises and creative endeavours.

Furthermore, the medium can answer the diversity of the digital audience, who now look, not only for content in storytelling, but interactivity and community. On the one hand, globalisation blurs the cultural boundaries between them. On the other hand, localisation is the process wherein their diversity is catered to and local identities are featured. Andrea Esser remarks in the introduction of *Media across Borders* (2016): 'Digitalization has brought many changes to the international distribution of entertainment media products in the new millennium, and it will continue to do so. We

can expect the internationalization, proliferation, and convergence of entertainment media to proceed and audiences to continue to fragment'.³⁰³ According to her, the options given to media consumers are 'likely to continue to grow, and they will also include modes of translation'. Both academia and industry seek to understand audiences and their preferences, the latter so 'they can cater to the diversity of preferences to keep or extend their market positions or open up new markets'. Therefore, audiences and industry continue to influence each other in the 'glocalisation' process of storytelling.

With the growing trend of mobile usage and the internet, illustrated e-books for mobile devices can promote globalisation and transcultural storytelling. Since rapid advancement is ubiquitous in the digital world, one can no longer predict the next big thing in digital storytelling. Surely, we will see more and more inventions that gratify humans' endless desire for storytelling. In 2006, Henry Jenkins envisioned that soon in the digital narrative world, the circulation of media content – throughout different systems – would depend heavily on consumers' active participation.³⁰⁴

Many media scholars and creative industry leaders share this point of view. Joonsung Yoon and Jaehwa Kim (2006) call interactive art 'the triggering and motivating point to discuss new aesthetic object in terms of art and science'.³⁰⁵ Miguel A.B Merino, in *Glocalization and Co-Creation*, recognises a trend in today's global market where consumers turn prosumers, who 'expect to influence products and

³⁰³ Esser, Bernal-Merino and Smith, *Media across Borders*, 13.

³⁰⁴ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, NYU Press.

³⁰⁵ Yoon and Kim, 'The Interactive Artwork as the Aesthetic Object', in *International Conference on Technologies*, 116–26.

services, so much so that design and production pipelines accommodate consumers' input in order to satisfy them and grow in the market'. He looks at the trend with optimism and concludes that this trend, which he calls *glocalization*, integrates the notion of 'the universal and the local into a strategic production structure for goods that aspire to be globally appealing'.³⁰⁶ Activision Blizzard, the world's largest and most profitable Western interactive entertainment firm, states in its 2013 report that an important element of its strategy is 'to develop content that is specifically directed toward local cultures and customs'.³⁰⁷

With this in mind, we can suppose that the responsibility for allowing inventions to expand our storytelling territories falls not on the technologies, but on the storytellers themselves. They are now expected not only to create stories, but also to consider the convergent experiences of readers, who are now players and co-creators of the narratives. With the latest digital technologies, we can hope to see more and more stories that transcend cultural barriers. As readers constantly crave familiar stories with novelty, we can look forward to seeing more visual adaptations of classic literature in which cultural tradition meets universality.

³⁰⁶ Esser, Bernal-Merino and Smith, 213.

³⁰⁷ Activision-Blizzard, 'Activision-Blizzard Annual Report 2013', 4.

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Appendix

The terms used in the documented practical work development are listed below:

- **Act:** ‘Usually part of the traditional ‘three act structure’ of a narrative and composed of a sequence of developmental scenes, which lead to story crises and climaxes’.
- **Anthropomorphism:** ‘The imposition of human traits and characteristics on animals, objects and the environment’.
- **Colourscript:** A colour mood curve that determines the colour choices that correspond with specific events in the story.
- **Character:** ‘Characters are defined by story events. A character is revealed by the choices and decisions made. Characters have observable external qualities and traits, and perceivable internal motivations and objectives. Character development should be revealed through the narrative structure in a character arc’.
- **Objective:** ‘In each story event or scene, or in each of the characters/protagonists, there is normally a specific goal to be attained or fulfilled in the ultimate attainment of the “super objective”’.
- **Scene:** ‘A story context or period of time informed by actions, which dramatise the execution of character and narrative objectives, the development of story/conceptual requirements in the attainment of eventual closure, and the realisation of the “super objective”’.

- **Script:** ‘The working “blueprint” for the work; can appear in a variety of forms, from traditional descriptor/dialogue layouts, prose pieces, notes and sketches, storyboards, to photo-montages’.
- **Sequence:** ‘A sequence is a series of story events or scenes, which succeed each other in the creation of an act, or in the advance of an accumulating narrative’.
- **Story event:** ‘A particular narrative incident or action, which signals a change or development in the story and foregrounds a particular meaning or value. Usually, the story event is informed by dramatic conflict or a significant shift in emotional emphasis’.
- **Structure:** ‘In principle, structure can be understood as the choice and succession of story events which establish, problematise, complicate and resolve narrative/character questions, issues and outcomes, while simultaneously provoking specific emotions and responses’.
- **Treatment:** ‘A fully developed version of the narrative piece, which includes phase, sequence, or scene breakdowns, and includes a full description of the narrative development’.
- **Visualisation:** ‘The process by which the style, design and imagery is decided upon in the creation of a narrative. This might include mood boards, sketches, storyboards, character designs, backgrounds and layouts, props and costumes, visual effects etc’.

The image displays a collection of 100 comic book panels for the play 'Song of the Stone Monkey'. The panels are arranged in a 10x10 grid, with each panel numbered 1 to 100. The panels depict various scenes from the play, including characters in traditional Chinese clothing, a stone monkey, and a stone bridge. The panels are organized into acts, with 'ACT 1' appearing in panels 1, 11, 21, 31, 41, 51, 61, 71, 81, 91, and 100. The panels are labeled with 'ACT 1' and 'STORY OF THE MONKEY'.