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From Page to Screen:

Adaptation, Postcolonialism, and *The Garden of Evening Mists.*

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Abstract

This study explores how colonial memory is translated and reconfigured in the film adaptation of *The Garden of Evening Mists*, originally a novel by Tan Twan Eng. It examines the significance of adaptation in reshaping postcolonial narratives and addresses the problem of how cinematic reinterpretations may alter the complexity of colonial histories represented in literary texts. While the novel offers a layered engagement with memory, trauma, and imperial legacies in Malaya, the film raises questions of representational fidelity and cultural authenticity. The scope of the study is limited to a comparative analysis of selected narrative elements from the novel and its adaptation. Using adaptation theory and postcolonial theory as its framework, the study employs close reading and comparative analysis to identify what is retained, omitted, and transformed in the adaptation process. The findings suggest that although the film preserves key themes of memory and loss, it condenses interiority and historical nuance, resulting in a more visually driven but simplified portrayal of colonial trauma. This research contributes to adaptation and postcolonial studies by demonstrating how film adaptations can reshape cultural memory and influence interpretations of colonial history.

Keywords: The Garden of Evening Mist, memory, trauma, adaptation, postcolonial, garden, Japanese, Malaya

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Chapter 1 Introduction

In this chapter, a summary of the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives and question, and significance of the study will be provided as a groundwork of the research.

This chapter will be discussing how adaptation reframes colonial memory in the novel and film *The Garden of Evening Mist* by introducing them. The study's theoretical framework, which integrates postcolonial theory and adaptation theory to examine the connections between cultural identity, historical remembrance, and narrative alteration, is further established in this chapter. In this chapter, the theoretical frameworks, which are adaptation theory and postcolonial theory, will be merged in order to analyze cultural identity, historical memory, and narrative modification.

Background of the Study

Most of the time in media, when literary works are transferred to the screen, adaptation can be seen as an important procedure to interpret the story. It involves a lot of adjustment, such as to the narration, characters, and themes, just to reach the highest expectation in the film, hence, this method is more than just a mere content transfer (Pasopati et al., 2024). As Mariani (2024) has stated, most of the time, adaptation tries to reduce the complications by turning the internal monologues into visible conversation. This might sometimes change the audience engagement and emotional response. Besides that, the dialogue between the original text and the new form is also another aspect of adaptation that helps in viewing if the existing opinions are either confirmed or rejected (Tan, 2022). In the end, to have an effective form of adaptation, there needs to be a balance between the creative storytelling method and the originality of the source materials (Elbetri et al., 2021).

In a community where people are still coping with the aftereffects of colonialism, to be able to recover hidden histories and put back shared memories, storytelling is a very important

tool in postcolonial literature. These stories show the complexities of identity politics as they are associated with issues of trauma, memory, national identity, and cultural hybridity (Rashmi, 2024). This can be seen in the novels Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day,* where there are differing memory spaces, these novels and their adaptations have influenced colonization opinions (Akhtar, 2013). Additionally, the literature of former French colonies highlights the political aspects of representation in their work and demonstrates how writers address their colonial pasts (Patel, 2022). According to Bhambra (2024), the discussion of memory and identity emphasizes how important it is to critically reframe prevailing perspectives to recognize the importance of histories that have been ignored in the past.

The Garden of Evening Mists by Tan Twan Eng, a Malaysian novelist whose work has a firm basis in the complicated historical landscape of British Malaya and the Japanese Occupation, is one such work that provides rich material for this investigation. Teoh Yun Ling, a former Japanese prisoner and the only survivor of a cruel war camp, is the protagonist of the novel's multi-layered, introspective story. She finds safety in the Cameron Highlands by working as an apprentice for Aritomo, a mysterious Japanese gardener. According to Saxena (2019), the story explores the inconsistencies of colonial power, the conflict between remembering and forgetting, and the personal and national tragedy of war via Yun Ling's disjointed memories. The garden, a literal and figurative place of healing, art, and erasing, turns into a spot where history is both rewritten and preserved.

The Garden of Evening Mists was made into a film in 2019 by Taiwanese director Tom Lin Shu-yu, which brought the narrative to a larger audience. The film makes the unavoidable transition from a written to a visual story, even if it keeps many of the novel's essential components. Through the use of character performance, music, cinematography, mise-en-scène, and editing, the film reconstructs and reinterprets the presentation of national identity,

personal pain, and colonial memory. But this process of adaptation also brings up a number of important issues, such as which colonial and postcolonial themes from the novel are retained, changed, or left out of the film adaptation? What influence do these changes have on how the readers and viewers perceive Malaysia's colonial past and its continuous struggle with memory?

Adaptation theory and postcolonial theory will be used in this research to answer the problems and questions in this paper. By using the concepts of adaptation theory, such as fidelity, narrative transformation, intersemiotic translation, medium specificity, and cultural adaptation, it provides the methods to interpret how the story changes both conceptually and structurally across the novel and film. On the other hand, postcolonial theory helps in analyzing these changes viewed in adaptation theory in a wider perspective, such as colonial and postcolonial memory, hybridity, ambivalence, representation and voice, cultural imperialism, and nation and identity formation. Using this method, it helps to interpret how colonialism is viewed in the novel and the film, the characters who reflect the identities, and the memory and interpretation of the colonial power structure.

This study focuses on how adaptation and postcolonial theory combine to investigate what the changes are from the novel to the film and how those changes affect the perception of the audience consuming. It investigates the effects of narrative change on how colonial pain is portrayed and evaluates whether the adaptation supports, contradicts, or updates the postcolonial meanings contained in the source work. In the end, this research adds to the more general discussion concerning the ethics of representation, the politics of memory, and the transformational potential of storytelling in various media in postcolonial nations.

Statement of the Problem

The main problem addressed in this study is twofold. First, the adaptation of *The Garden of Evening Mists* from the novel to the film introduces significant changes in narration,

characters, themes, and symbols, which alter how the story is interpreted, especially in terms of how it depicts colonial memory and postcolonial identity. Second, there is a lack of scholarly research on Southeast Asian literary adaptations, particularly comparative studies that analyse the transformation of narratives from novel to screen. These two issues are the main issues this study attempts to address (Chin & Rajandran, 2020).

Rarely is adaptation a simple or impartial process. According to Perdikaki (2017), a literary work that is adapted into a film experiences a shift not only in medium but also in how meaning is created and conveyed. In order to examine the historical and personal traumas of Teoh Yun Ling a survivor of Japanese wartime captivity and a witness to the intricacies of British colonial rule, Tan Twan Eng's novel *The Garden of Evening Mists* mainly uses internal monologue, broken timelines, and symbolic landscapes. Alharbi and Alamri (2024) stated that by immersing readers in her subjective experiences, the novel highlights the emotional and psychological costs associated with healing, forgetting, and remembering. However, these components are reframed through a visual and aural perspective in the 2019 Tom Lin Shu-yu directed film adaptation, necessitating a more externalised storytelling style. As a result, several of the novel's introspective and narrative layers that are essential to its postcolonial message are simplified or generally left out of the film.

Characters might be portrayed differently, for example, and the nuances of Yun Ling's internal conflict, her conflicting sentiments towards Aritomo and her colonial background, as well as her guilt and shame, might not be given the same level of attention. Saxena (2019) has argued that without adequate narrative context, symbols like the garden, tattooing, and the Japanese aesthetic principle that permeate the novel lose their interpretive depth despite being graphically conveyed. These changes are not insignificant, as they reshape the way viewers perceive Malaysia's colonial history, the psychological aftermath of war, and the nuanced process of identity formation in a postcolonial nation. Consequently, the adaptation can lead to

a version of the story that diverges in tone, message, and emotional impact from the source material, thereby altering its engagement with postcolonial themes.

Conversely, it has been observed that there are minimal Southeast Asian literature studies focusing on adaptation, especially when it comes to Malaysian narratives that show the changes of the adaptation and the impact on the audiences. As Chin & Quayum (2021) stated, even with different ethnic and historical storylines examined in Malaysian literature in English (MLE), adaptations usually prioritize worldwide film standards over local distinctiveness and cultural authenticity. Most of the time, in Southeast Asian films, local films are affected by postcolonial stories but rarely are studied from an adaptation perspective. This aligns with wider trends in the film. The need for deeper investigation, which studies the changes and their effects on the audience, has to be highlighted, as the cultural politics and the memories of the original texts tend to change during the adaptation procedures (Bernards, 2012).

The way that adaptation serves as a place of negotiation between author and filmmaker, text and audience, and memory and history is not fully understood because of the lack of scholarly attention. Important questions remain unsolved in the absence of a critical framework to analyse these processes, such as how much of the original text's ideological depth is preserved in adaptations? In what ways does visual aesthetics support or contradict postcolonial critique? What cultural repercussions result from modifying national narratives for wider, occasionally Westernized film consumption?

This study tackles these interconnected issues by using *The Garden of Evening Mists* as a case study. It addresses the academic undervaluation of Southeast Asian adaptation studies and investigates how the adaptation alters the narrative's interaction with colonial memory and postcolonial identity. This study aims to make a significant contribution to both fields by utilizing a combined theoretical approach, pulling from postcolonial theory to examine the ideological implication of those alterations and from adaptation theory to track the formal and

narrative shifts between the novel and film. It makes the case that narrative shifts in adaptation are never just artistic choices but rather have historical, political, and cultural significance, especially in a postcolonial country still dealing with the effects of colonialism.

Research Objectives

By the end of this research, the researcher will have:

1. Determined and examined the main shifts in narration, characters, themes, and symbols that take place when *The Garden of Evening Mists* is adapted from novel to film, and assessed how these shifts impact how the story is interpreted.

2. Analyzed how the adaptation alters the portrayal of colonial memory and postcolonial identity by applying both adaptation theory and postcolonial theory.

Research Questions

1. What changes occur in the themes, characters, and symbols during the adaptation of *The Garden of Evening Mists* from novel to film, and how do these changes influence the audience's interpretation of the story?

2. How does the adaptation reshape the representation of colonial memory and postcolonial identity when the changes are analyzed through the frameworks of adaptation theory and postcolonial theory?

Definition of Key Terms

1. Adaptation in film: The process of adapting a literary work into a different medium, such as film or television, is intricate and multidimensional (Oza, 2024).

2. Fidelity: The degree to which a particular artistic creation, typically a film in adaptation studies, reflects an accurate comprehension of its source, which is usually a literary work, is referred to as faithfulness (Johnson, 2017).

3. Hybridity: The development of new transcultural forms brought about by colonization inside the contact zone (Mambrol, 2016).

4. Ambivalence: The intricate combination of repulsion and attraction that defines the colonizer-colonized interaction (Mambrol, 2017).

5. Intersemiotic translation: Considered the foundation for cultural communication, which uses language, images, and other semiotic tools to spread, communicate, and explain ideas (Jakobson, 1959).

6. Medium Specificity: Every art form, or "medium," has distinct and innate qualities, its "materiality," that characterize its artistic potential and need to be investigated "purely" and according to its own guidelines (Toikkanen, 2023).

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it provides a targeted and comparative examination of how the narration, characters, themes, and symbols of *The Garden of Evening Mists* are changed from the novel to film, especially with regard to colonial memory and postcolonial identity. These changes are profoundly cultural and political in nature rather than just technical or artistic. The study shows how adaptability is essential in forming or modifying the collective memory of colonial trauma by examining how such changes impact audience interpretation. This is particularly pertinent in Malaysia, where literature and film are important platforms for reimagining and challenging the legacy of colonization.

Moreover, as it creates an interdisciplinary framework by fusing postcolonial theory and adaptation theory, the research is also academically useful. A more nuanced and critical comprehension of how narratives vary across media and why those changes, particularly with regard to national identity, cultural hybridity, and the politics of representation, whereas adaptation theory concentrates on narrative transformation and medium-specific limitations.

The study provides a methodological model for future literary adaptation research, especially in historically colonized countries, by synthesizing diverse viewpoints.

In terms of culture, the work fills a significant void in the literature and film studies of Southeast Asia. Notwithstanding the depth of Malaysian storytelling, little scholarly research has been done on how these tales are adapted for the big screen and how this affects how the general public views history and identity. This study raises Malaysian literature and film in the context of international academic debate by using *The Garden of Evening Mists* as a case study. Southeast Asian storytelling is emphasized as deserving of critical and theoretical attention, particularly in light of its colonial past and postcolonial present, and the Western-centricity of adaptation theory is contested.

Finally, the study adds to the broader discussion of how narrative shapes national identity. It is essential to comprehend how film reframes literary texts as it becomes the predominant medium for narrative communication. This study demonstrates that adaptation is a political and cultural act that can either maintain or alter the ideological core of the original work, in addition to being a creative reinterpretation. By doing this, the study not only advances postcolonial theory and adaptability, but it also encourages future researchers and educators to investigate the ways in which stories serve as instruments for historical negotiation, identity creation, and cultural memory.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter critically examines the transition of *The Garden of Evening Mists* from novel to film, with particular attention to how colonial memory is created, reframed, or erased in the adaptation process, drawing on adaptation and postcolonial theory to analyze both the aesthetic shift across media and their sociopolitical implications. To be able to understand effectively, it is important to first have a structured understanding that explains how adaptation works. This foundation is provided by Adaptation Theory.

Adaptation Theory

A critical framework for analyzing how a story is altered when it is adapted from one medium to another, especially from a literary to a cinematic one, is offered by adaptation theory (Hutcheon, 2006). According to Hutcheon (2006), it highlights that adaptation is an intrinsically creative, interpretive, and transformational endeavor, challenging the notion that adaptations should strive for perfect faithfulness to the original material. Adaptations are viewed as new texts, texts that are shaped by the requirements of the medium, the filmmaker's vision, and the expectations of target audiences, rather than being evaluated only on how "accurately" a film reflects its source (Alwazzan, 2024).

Understanding how *The Garden of Evening Mists* changes as it transitions from the reflective, prose-rich medium of the novel to the sensual and visual language of film is crucial for this study's application of adaptation theory. The protagonist Yun Ling's introspective voice, intricate historical references, and symbolic motifs are crucial to the novel's internal narration and fractured structure. But the film must convey these aspects using visual techniques like dialogue, sound, editing, mise-en-scène, and cinematography, all of which work differently from the literary strategies used in the novel.

According to adaptation theory, each medium has unique storytelling tools, limitations, and strengths that influence the adaptation process. Film can rapidly depict landscapes,

historical reconstructions, and facial emotions, but it finds it difficult to convey internal monologue or in-depth background explanation without the use of spoken or visual cues (Hutcheon, 2006). Therefore, in order to successfully convey meaning in cinematic form, some aspects of the text are shortened, removed, or changed in the adaptation, and not necessarily to make the plot simpler.

The fact that adaptation always entails interpretation is another important aspect of adaptation theory. Certain philosophies or artistic objectives are reflected in the decisions made by directors and screenwriters regarding what should be emphasized, what should be left out, and what should be restructured (Tan, 2022). In this sense, the adaptation becomes a prism through which the original content is re-examined. The communication of cultural memory, identity, and historical trauma may be impacted by these decisions, which may be motivated by a desire to appeal to a global audience, follow certain film trends, or investigate various thematic vantage points.

The purpose of this study is to understand how and why the story varies across media and what these changes mean in regard to Malaysia's colonial history and postcolonial identity, rather than to assess whether the film is "faithful" to the novel. Dissecting the adaptation as an act of cultural mediation is made easier by concepts like intersemiotic translation, medium specificity, narrative transformation, integrity discourse, and cultural adaptation. In the end, this framework will direct the analysis of what is kept, changed, or removed in the film adaptation and how these choices affect how viewers understand the postcolonial themes of the narrative.

To further analyse the relationship between the novel and its adaptation, fidelity discourse can come in handy, as it focuses on how adaptations stay loyal to their original materials throughout the process.

Fidelity Discourse

In fidelity discourse there are three aspects, which are literal, spiritual, and cultural fidelity, each focusing on how adaptation relates to their original source. Literal fidelity is when the plots and dialogues of a film are replicated exactly, while adaptation, such as Wolfgang Peterson's *Troy*, closely follows the Iliad's events while making important changes (Harold, 2018). Conversely, spirit fidelity focuses on the reservation of ideas and the emotional tone, for example, Walter Salees's *On the Road* shows that it was still true to the narrative even though some important details were left out (Mackenzie, 2023). And finally, when the historical and cultural settings are respected and maintained, that is known as cultural fidelity, a term that is now more famous after a push from scholars (Charbonneau, 2018). Though fidelity is both a helpful framework and an unpopular idea in film studies, it is still an ongoing debate (Vooght, 2018).

According to Connor (2017), fidelity forces orderly connection between the original text and the adaptation, and this causes the latter to be reduced to a simpler version. On the other hand, Robert Stam (2003) and Linda Hutcheon (2006) stated that rather than seeing adaptation as an inferior version, it should be seen as a clever reinterpretation in textual conversation. Hutcheon (2006) also rejects the statement that adaptation is considered successful depending on its accurate replication, instead she views it as a process of rewriting and rebuilding it. She argues that rather than being subservient to the source, adaptations are intertextual in nature, participating in a dialogue with it.

Even after the criticism, fidelity is a very important and valuable tool that can be used in helping to understand the impact of the shifts in narrative and not just as a metric for quality (Loh, 2013). It can also be helpful in identifying the effects that the changes in narrative have left, especially in the postcolonial aspects where history, memory, and identity make an impactful change in the meaning of it (Nayyar, 2024). This change is especially true for *The*

Garden of Evening Mists, which vividly depicts trauma, colonial Malaya, and national identity. Tom Lin's 2019 film adaptation unavoidably takes decisions regarding what to keep, change, or leave out. This study critically analyzes whether the adaptation preserves the historical significance and thematic depth of the original novel or if those aspects are simplified or reinterpreted for cinematic purposes using the fidelity discourse lens. Intersemiotic translation is also another necessary concept to understand how meaning shifts when the story is moved from one medium to another.

Intersemiotic Translation (Jakobson, 1959)

The process of interpreting verbal signs using non-verbal sign systems, such as images, sounds, and gestures, is known as intersemiotic translation, a term that linguist Roman Jakobson first introduced in his 1959 essay "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation." (Wu, 2014). Intersemiotic translation, sometimes known as "transmutation," is the process of changing one semiotic mode into another, such as turning a novel into a film, as opposed to interlingual translation, which consists of translating text between languages. Intersemiotic translation is not only an additional tool, but it is also an important aspect used in re-expressing meanings in many other communication channels (Jakobson, 1959).

To be able to explain, spread, and translate ideas, other semiotic resources are often used in communication, which is known as intersemiotic translation. How the meaning is an advantage to the targeted medium is investigated and examined, and not only replicated. According to O'Halloran (2016), from this angle, intersemiotic translation is conceptualized through the principle of resemiotization, which helps to study how semiotic decisions are translated throughout time into social activities. According to Holubenko (2022), often expressions, visual metaphors, or sounds are used to replace internal monologues. By researching cognitive and multimodal translation, further focus is given on both the verbal and visual modes to be able to replicate speech, emotions, and temporal structure.

The film may use visual metaphors like mist-shrouded gardens, tonal changes in lighting, or even silence broken by close-ups to convey Yun Ling's contemplative narrative voice from the novel. For example, the idea of intersemiotic translation, as it applies to *The Garden of Evening Mists*, sheds light on how literary elements like Yun Ling's internal monologue, jumbled memory sequences, and symbolic motifs are adapted into motion picture expressions. In the film, flashbacks that in the novel seem like fragmented introspective thoughts could be transformed into imaginative montages or stylized dream sequences. Comparably, literary symbols give way to sensory experiences when symbolic elements like the Japanese garden, ink darkness, and scarred flesh are incorporated into visual and spatial design.

The research may essentially follow how *The Garden of Evening Mists* gets reauthorized in its cinematic form through intersemiotic translation as a new text that engages with its literary roots, re-expressing pain and memory through qualitative variations in semiotic code. Thus, this theoretical tool becomes essential for examining the type of ideological and emotional resonance that is either maintained or altered when Yun Ling's story is adapted for the screen.

Medium specificity is also important to comprehend how these changes take place across various forms, as it influences what is presented and how meaning is created.

Medium Specificity

According to Hutcheon (2006), a fundamental idea in adaptation theory, medium specificity, is based on the idea that every artistic medium has distinct expressive potential and constraints that naturally influence how a story is told. Fundamentally, medium specificity asserts that various artistic mediums, including literature, film, painting, and theatre, ought to be interpreted in light of their unique material and stylistic characteristics, which impact both aesthetics and meaning-making (Hutcheon, 2006). These distinctions are particularly

noticeable in literary-to-film adaptations, whereas films use visual imagery, sound, editing, and spatial composition, novels rely on internal voice, descriptive detail, and temporal flexibility (Jeffries, 2024).

Medium specificity has long been defended by film theorists as a means of acknowledging cinema as a separate art form from literature. For example, André Bazin highlighted how the photographic realism of film introduces a type of narrative immediacy specific to the medium by capturing the "presentness" of reality in ways that prose cannot (Cardwell, 2024). Medium specificity has been explored and expanded upon by modern scholars like Noël Carroll (1985), who see it as a helpful heuristic for comprehending the aesthetic and cognitive distinctions between media rather than just as essentialist formalism.

Because it allows us to concentrate on how the film adaptation uses cinematic tools such as mise-en-scène, lighting, sound design, and editing to represent themes that are primarily conveyed in the novel through Yun Ling's introspection and historical exposition, this theoretical framework is especially pertinent when analyzing *The Garden of Evening Mists*. For instance, the film must evoke the same effect through carefully crafted visual imagery, such as mist-covered landscapes, lingering shots of the Japanese garden, or close-ups of scarred skin, all accompanied by music and ambient sound, as the novel might do through detailed internal monologue about the emotional weight of Yun Ling's memories.

Furthermore, the way that film handles time and narrative structure differently from text can be explained by medium specificity. Filmmakers must control comparable effects by editing decisions like montage, cross-cutting, or non-linear pacing, but textual narratives can readily modify chronology through flashbacks or free indirect discourse. As Bluestone (1957) has claimed through visual symbols and separate sequences, time and memory are often used in showing the presentness of film instead of narration. And this may cause the adaptation of Yun Ling's past to be influenced by viewers' perception of her trauma and memory as it is

compressed, rearranged, and visually changed. Building on this, it is crucial to look at how the film changes the plot of the novel itself, especially with regard to focus, tempo, and structure. The idea of narrative change follows from this.

Narrative Transformation

The term "narrative transformation" refers to how the story's focus, timing, and structure change when it moves from the novel to the screen. This is another important idea in adaptation studies. As Landa (1990) has stated, in order for a story to have a logical storytelling flow, its temporal flow, point of view, and rhythm must all be organized as the narrative transformation process. In novels, to change the chronology flow, raw chronological occurrence known as fabula and order of presentation known as syuzhet are used, while in the films editing, montage, framing, and other cinematic methods are used to compare the results (Lee et al., 2017).

While a film must coordinate visual coherence and emotional effect within time constraints, often condensing events or rearranging scenes, a literary narrative can seamlessly traverse numerous time periods and psychological depths. A huge change in the perspective experience could be impacted if there is a change in the pace and structure of a novel's adaptation to the film. According to adaptation theory, about 30% of films are based on novels, and in order to keep the drama moving in less than two hours, these usually need to have their narratives condensed and rearranged (Mariani, 2024).

Narrative transformation is further supported by the idea of focalization. The act of limiting narrative viewpoint, such as internal, external, or omniscient, to decide how much character consciousness is communicated is known as focalization, according to Gérard Genette (Jahn, 1996). The film probably uses external focalization, changing the audience's access to emotional interiority through visual cues rather than first-person narration, thereby reshaping the interpretive lens of colonial memory. This is in contrast to *The Garden of Evening*

Mists novel, which uses internal focalization, narrated through Yun Ling's subjective reflections.

Changing the symbolic sequences by rearranging or shortening them, there may be alteration in the allocation of the thematic weight, such as the garden rites, the tattooing, or even the foggy scenes. By applying these ideas to *The Garden of Evening Mists*, it becomes clear that narrative change is essential to redefining the representation of colonial pain and memory. Oftentimes, the richness of the film starts to reduce because the filmmakers tend to prioritize other emotional scenes in order to reach their expected time limit. In order to maintain clarity and dramatic coherence, the novel's non-linear chronology, which interweaves the past and present through Yun Ling's reflections, may be changed into a filmic timeline that rearranges or removes certain flashbacks. Based on the knowledge of both structural and thematic changes, it is crucial to take into account how cultural aspects are altered in adaptations to meet the needs of various audiences and customer demands. This leads the analysis to the topic of cultural adaptation.

Cultural Adaptation

Cultural adaptation is also another one of the key concepts of adaptation. Often the purposeful changes that are made in adapting a film just to make it seem acceptable to the wider audience, mostly the Western or global audience, are known as cultural adaptation. According to Mariani (2024), these changes can be a downgrade, as they downplay specific cultural situations by simplifying complex dialogue or removing emotional journeys from the film. That is because, as stated by Lee et al. (2017), the filmmakers are more interested in making their work famous by resonating internationally and trying to avoid alienating audiences that are unfamiliar with these views. It can be said that cultural adaptation is a part of both the creative decision and the business world.

When it comes to adaptations of film in the local literature, Southeast Asian filmmakers are often under the most pressure in order to bring balance to show cultural individuality and to market their production globally (Nie, 2025). Presenting sensitive cultural topics, such as the aftereffects of colonialism or indigenous identities, using well-known cinematic tropes or visual palettes that viewers around the world are accustomed to may be one way to achieve this delicate balance. Just to make sure the film reaches a wider audience with cross-cultural backgrounds, the adaptations are usually neutralized in the sense of political and historical complexities (Lovatt & Trice, 2021).

Tom Lin Shu-yu's 2019 film adaptation of Tan Twan Eng's novel, *The Garden of Evening Mists*, is a prime example of this conflict. In partnership with HBO Asia, Astro Shaw produced the film, which was distributed internationally in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Brunei, and Singapore. It was mostly shot in English with some dialogue in Japanese, Malay, and Cantonese. Its multicultural and multilingual production background indicates efforts to appeal to a broader worldwide audience in addition to Malaysian or regional viewers (Nie, 2025).

It is possible to determine whether cultural adaptation enhances or lessens the novel's ideological depth by looking at how the film handles and navigates postcolonial topics. Historical specificity permeates the novel's depiction of Yun Ling's complicated psychological journey, the Japanese occupation, and Malaya's colonial past. It may have simplified some plots or subplots in order to follow the themes of love, sorrow, and forgiveness, which are "universal," and this would have reduced the importance of postcolonialism to the wider and global audience. The film carries the risk of being aestheticized in adaptation from their themes, which are personal anguish and existential passivity, if they are not controlled carefully (Poon, 2016).

Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory is the aftereffects of colonialism on representation, memory, identity, and culture (Ghosh et al., 2008). This theory helps in carefully examining how the way colonization culture is still facing racial inequality, cultural displacement, and historical erasure from imperial authority (Ashcroft, 2001). This theory is important for this study, as postcolonial theory helps in revealing, both in the novel and film, how colonial trauma, hybrid identity, cultural memory, and national consciousness are portrayed and reframed in *The Garden of Evening Mist.*

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002) stated that the act of resistance against forgetting or erasing imperial brutality in postcolonial literature is not only a personal effort of recall but also a political act. The most important ideas in this research are colonial and postcolonial memory. In *The Garden of Evening Mists,* the act of remembering is very intimate in terms of both individual and collective healing. Memory turns into a space for challenging the colonial past, as evidenced by Yun Ling's disjointed memories of wartime horror, her conflicted views towards the Japanese, and her position. How these memories are visually reinterpreted, or perhaps softened or romanticized, in a film adaptation begs important questions about what is changed, what is preserved, and why.

Homi Bhabha (1994) introduced the idea of hybridity, which is closely related to memory. The term "hybridity" describes the cultural area where new, mixed identities arise as a result of the colonizer and colonized intersecting (Bhandari, 2022). The figure of Aritomo, a former gardener to the Japanese Emperor who now lives in exile in British Malaya and instructs Yun Ling in Japanese garden design, is a representation of this hybridity in the novel. Despite her personal trauma, Yun Ling is a hybrid character who is ethnically Chinese, educated in English law, and emotionally entangled with Japanese culture. According to Frenkel (2008), Bhabha's concept of the "third space" serves as a potent prism through which to examine how

these people defy established identities and how the adaptation either accentuates or streamlines this intricacy for the sake of cinematic narrative.

Another important idea is ambivalence, which describes the conflicting feelings of attraction and repulsiveness colonial people frequently have towards the colonizer's culture (Ihidero & Liman, 2022). This duality is best illustrated by Yun Ling's relationship with Aritomo. She is deeply resentful of the Japanese for their wartime crimes, but she is also captivated by Aritomo's mystery, discipline, and artistic ability. The film adaptation may romanticize or visually minimize this ambivalence, which is rich in the novel's introspective narration. We may assess how well this ideological tension is maintained across media by using postcolonial analysis.

Voice and representation can also be considered important concepts in postcolonial discourse. According to Nicholas (2010), postcolonial theory studies the dominant power structure, who is allowed to tell their story, and who is not. For example, in the novel, it can be obviously seen that Yun Ling tells her story herself. She has the power over the trauma, memory, and narrative. However, in the film, her voice is toned down, including speech, mise-en-scene, and images. This raises questions like whether her subjectivity has been diminished in the adaptation. The theory helps in the process of identifying if the film is supporting or is against the colonial narrative.

Lastly, to identify how local stories affect the shaping of global cinematic norms is known as cultural imperialism, which is also a significant aspect (Naeem et al., 2020). There is a higher possibility that the film is toned down from its postcolonial characteristics in order to be able to align with global narrative and aesthetic norms, as it is made for a worldwide audience.

Does the adaptation subtly support colonial legacies, or does it question them? It is very important to see how, for the Western audience, the struggle of Malaya's history is reframed.

In conclusion, postcolonial theory is a very useful theory for examining how memory, identity, and power are negotiated in *The Garden of Evening Mists's* adaptation. It doesn't only portray the importance of the content of the story but also how the political changes represent the decisions made. It is important to pay particular attention to how colonial and postcolonial memory function within the text in order to enhance this study of how memory acts within a narrative and its adaptation. This brings up the topic of colonial and postcolonial memory.

Colonial and Postcolonial Memory

According to postcolonial theory, memory serves as a location of both individual trauma and group healing, it also serves as a means of historical identity and reconstruction and resistance to erasure. Postcolonial writings restore silenced histories and voices in order to counter imperial narratives (Rothberg, 2013). According to Saxena (2020), memory is central to Tan Twan Eng's *The Garden of Evening Mists,* especially through Yun Ling, the protagonist, whose memories straddle personal anguish, wartime pain, and national legacy.

Saxena (2020) has also stated that the novel examines how memory's two aspects, personal and collective, are connected. Alongside more general historical currents about colonial control, nation-building, and war atrocities, individual memories endure. According to academics like Vandana Saxena, Tan's story skillfully balances the conflict between trauma and nostalgia, demonstrating how selective and politically charged memory shapes how the past is recalled and suppressed. Critics also point out that *The Garden* explores the erasure implied in nostalgia and the selective preservation of history, where forgetting can act as a protective mechanism in the development of postcolonial identities (Saxena, 2020).

In the novel, recollection is portrayed through first-person narration, nonlinear chronology, and frequent reflection. Readers might experience both emotional resistance and psychological suffering because of Yun Ling's inner voice. Her battle with Aritomo, her guilt about surviving, and her trial reflections all add to a complex, dialectical remembering that is

not just romanticized but agonized. The film adaptation uses flashbacks, symbolic mise-en-scène, and extended quiet to visually represent memory. While major events such as internment, garden-building, love, and grief are kept, the spoken interiority is diminished. With less obvious conflict over the political aspect of memory, the emotional tone changes from critical interrogation to meditative beauty.

The effects of this change are profound. Poon (2016) and other postcolonial critics warn against the aestheticization of trauma, which portrays memory as elegiac art rather than a history of resistance. Instead of maintaining its collective weight and political urgency, the film might dilute the historical aggressiveness of Japanese occupation and reduce remembrance to personal anguish in the absence of Yun Ling's narrative commentary. Furthermore, the adaptation's portrayal of Malaysia's postcolonial identity is limited by the deletion of historical context and community, such as post-independence tensions or wartime hardship in internment camps, which transforms what was once a public memory into a more romanticized, private story. Building on the discussions of memory and postcolonial identity, it is critical to analyse how cultural and individual identities overlap and evolve in the setting of colonial impact. This focuses on Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity.

Hybridity (Homi Bhabha)

Homi Bhabha first used the term "hybridity" in The Location of Culture (1994), referring to the cultural "third space" that is produced when colonizer and colonized identities mix and combine. By upending fixed identities and binary oppositions, this idea emphasizes the negotiation of difference that takes place in colonial and postcolonial contexts (Abou-Agag, 2021).

Characters like Aritomo, a Japanese gardener in exile who formerly worked for the Emperor, and Yun Ling, an Anglophile Straits Chinese judge, exemplify Bhabha's concept of hybridity in The Garden of Evening Mists. Cultural intersections are expertly handled in the

novel, Yun Ling's identity is influenced by her Chinese ancestry, British education, and her experiences during the Japanese occupation of the war. Aritomo, a person who transcends rigid cultural allegiances, lives in Malaya, engages in Japanese art, and speaks with local resistance movements.

According to Wang Zhen and colleagues (2025), through the deculturation from Chinese ancestry, the acculturation of Japanese aesthetics, and finally the fusion into a hybrid identity, Yun Ling's journey is known by her transcultural identity. Similar to Bhabha's "in-between" zone, it shows a place of cultural innovation, ambivalence, and negotiation. Literary devices such as nonlinear narrative structures, introspective focalization, and profoundly symbolic imagery in the Japanese garden are used in the novel to portray this hybridity, resulting in a multi-layered sense of emotional tension and cultural negotiation. Readers experience Yun Ling's conflicted emotions, including resistance and intimacy, wrath and intrigue, and grief and thankfulness.

In contrast, the film version graphically depicts hybridity through the physical environment, garden aesthetics, and sensory atmosphere, all while keeping the characters and main plotlines. The Japanese garden known as Yugiri in Cameron Highlands serves as a visual representation of cultural fusion. Rather than portraying this hybridity as an ideological conflict, the film tends to frame it as a harmonious aesthetic. Instead of critical criticism, scenes showing Aritomo teaching Yun Ling patience and artistry are depicted with lyricism, which could reduce cultural ambivalence to emotional closure. Following the topic of hybridity and the negotiation of cultural identities, it is necessary for studying the tensions and contradictions that arise in these exchanges. This leads to Homi Bhabha's theory of ambivalence.

Ambivalence (Bhabha)

A key component of postcolonial theory is Homi Bhabha's concept of ambivalence, which describes the psychological and cultural division that colonized subjects go through as

they are torn between continuing to be different and copying colonial culture (Farahbaksh & Sheykhani, 2018). Ambivalence creates a "double vision" within identity structure by producing mimicry that is both subversive and conforming, undermining obvious colonial authority (Sivasankaran & Vijay, 2025).

The relationship between Yun-Ling and Aritomo in *The Garden of Evening Mist* is the most potent example of this ambivalence. Yun Ling, a judge with a British education and a survivor of Japanese incarceration, finds herself attracted to Aritomo, a Japanese garden expert. Contradiction and emotional complexity abound in their relationship. Yun-Ling both romanticizes and rejects Japanese culture. Despite the horrors of her experiences at the hands of the Japanese, reviewers point out that hers is "a story of a Chinese-Malaysian woman who comes to love a Japanese man" (Whittle, 2018). Deeply ingrained in traumatic experience, this romance conveys ambivalence on both a cultural and psychological level.

Aritomo's persona also mirrors Bhabha's ambivalent personality. Former Emperor Hirohito's gardener, now living in exile in Malaya, combines Japanese garden philosophy with local resistance groups, making him a "hybrid subject" who rejects rigid national allegiances (Glaser, 2022).

This ambivalence is portrayed differently in adaptation. Yun Ling's bewilderment, self-loathing, and attraction are profoundly revealed in the novel's internal monologue. However, the film tends to ease this internal conflict. The ambivalent ideological conflict is lessened or subtextualized while the romantic connection is highlighted. Though the internal debate over colonial violence and cultural dislocation is not as clearly expressed, the scenes between Yun Ling and Aritomo are exquisitely filmed and emotionally powerful.

From a postcolonial theory standpoint, this change is significant. Bhabha contends that by exposing imitation as difference, ambivalence is a disruptive force that has the power to upend colonial rhetoric (Ashcroft, 2001). The film's potential for postcolonial critique may be

lowered if Yun Ling's conflicted emotional state is lessened, turning the complicated political tension into a more acceptable romantic narrative.

In conclusion, the analysis of characters such as Yun Ling and Aritomo as morally complicated, culturally hybrid agents relies heavily on ambivalence. The film externalizes their relationship while downplaying ideological discord, whereas the text uses narration to highlight this contradiction. Therefore, postcolonial theory enables us to question whether the adaptation reframes the ambivalence as aesthetic closure or maintains it, together with its disruptive potential. Based on the idea of ambivalence and power dynamics among identities, it is critical to evaluate which views are stressed or suppressed in both the novel and its adaptation. This introduces the concepts of representation and voice.

Representation and Voice

The question of who has the power to speak and whose voice is suppressed or marginalized in colonial and postcolonial narratives is a common one in postcolonial theory (Kakungulu, 2024). According to Haste & Bermudez (2017), particularly in situations where history and identity are disputed, narrative agency, the power dynamics around storytelling, is the focus of the concepts of representations and voice. These issues are particularly important in postcolonial literature and film since colonial regimes have traditionally silenced indigenous voices while advancing prevailing imperialist narratives. Reclaiming indigenous or previously marginalized viewpoints thus turns into a crucial act of reclamation and resistance (Spivak, 1988/2003).

The foundation for analyzing how Western narratives frequently present the East via exoticized or demeaning lenses, essentially speaking for the colonized rather than letting them speak, was established by Edward Said's idea of Orientalism (1978) (Mohrem, 2020). Postcolonial writings, on the other hand, frequently attempt to change this by giving those who were previously denied narrative agency back. It is necessary to critically analyse how and

whether the voices of marginalized subjects, especially colonized women, are represented or eroded, as Spivak notably posed in her landmark essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1998).

According to Alwazzan (2024), the transition from text to screen in the adaptation field may entail significant adjustments to the narrative voice. In order to provide a subjective and frequently politicized voice, novels frequently use internal monologues, introspective narrations, and first-person narratives that provide profound access to a character's consciousness. In contrast, interiority is communicated through images, actions, conversations, and cinematic methods in film, which, as a visual medium, leans towards exterior representations (Kashaka, 2025). This shift has the ability to muffle or weaken the subjective voice, especially in postcolonial text adaptations where the protagonist's viewpoint frequently acts as a means of contesting prevailing histories (Kakungulu, 2024).

Teoh Yun Ling has direct narrative control over her memories, trauma, and interpretations of colonial heritage since she narrates *The Garden of Evening Mists* in the first person. She is positioned as an active participant in the retelling and reinterpretation of historical events by this narrative decision. Scholar Grace V. S. Chin (2016) asserts that this type of narrative structure highlights how crucial female memory is to the reconstruction of national history (Saxena, 2021). The plot is told mainly through visual storytelling and sparse voice-over in the film adaptation, though, which establishes a tone that is more detached and objective. The consequences of this change in voice and representation, especially with regard to how memory, identity, and agency are portrayed.

To put it briefly, postcolonial theory's notion of representation and voice highlights who has the opportunity to tell the tale and how adaptation can maintain, change, or eliminate narrative authority. Understanding these interconnections is extremely important when assessing the changes of postcolonial stories into different areas, such as *The Garden of Evening Mists.* In addition to the debate of representation and narrative authority, it is critical

to consider how broader cultural influences influence which stories are told and how they are presented. This brings up the issue of cultural imperialism.

Cultural Imperialism

As stated by García and Birkinbine (2018), using language, art, and media, rather than political control, to influence one culture over another is known as cultural imperialism. People tend to consider Western cultural standards as a universal view, challenging the way non-Western societies are framed in novels and films, as it has roots in postcolonial and globalization theories (Krishnaswamy, 2002). This creates a conflict between Western legibility and cultural authenticity in postcolonial situations, particularly when local narratives are modified for internal consumption. According to academics like Edward Said and Herbert Schiller, cultural imperialism arises when indigenous narratives, aesthetics, and languages are obscured or replaced by Western media and cultural products (García & Birkinbine, 2018).

The 2019 film adaptation has received mixed reviews for striking a balance between local authenticity and global appeal, despite the novel's strong roots in Malayan history, culture, and linguistic realities. This idea is pertinent to *The Garden of Evening Mists* when considering the visual aesthetic, linguistic decisions, and narrative structure of the film adaptation.

For example, a number of critics have pointed out that the film's pacing and cinematography are similar to Western art-house cinema, with extended shots, muted emotional tones, and little speech (Lee, 2024). Given its international festival circuit screenings (such as the Busan International Film Festival and Golden Horse Awards), this could be interpreted as an effort to adhere to Western cinematic standards. Despite colonial Malaya's multilingual reality, English is frequently used as the main language in scenes. This could possibly be a result of efforts to make the film more accessible to Western or international viewers. As previously noted by critics like Khoo Gaik Cheng, Southeast Asian films

frequently experience "cultural smoothing" when produced for international distribution, eschewing intricate regional subtleties in favor of well-known clichés or polished looks (Chunsaengchan, 2022).

In order to critically assess whether the film adaptation resists, negotiates, or submits to Western norms in its portrayal of postcolonial Malaya—and whether this impacts the authenticity of the narrative's cultural and historical memory—it is necessary to apply the lens of cultural imperialism. The question of how postcolonial cultures develop their own sense of nationhood and identity is closely linked to the impact of external cultural factors. This brings the conversation to the topic of nation and identity formation.

Nation and Identity Formation

The development of national identity in the wake of colonialism is one of the main issues in postcolonial theory. As a result of colonial divide-and-rule methods, postcolonial countries frequently struggle to create a unified national narrative from disparate ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups after attaining independence. This process is greatly aided by postcolonial literature and film, which offer venues for projecting collective memory and recovering historical narratives (Kanojia, 2025).

According to Benedict Anderson's seminal notion of the "imagined community" (1983), nations are socially produced through shared experiences and narratives, particularly those propagated through institutions, literature, and the media, rather than being natural or everlasting. In a postcolonial setting, cultural materials like novels and films become effective means of redefining a country's identity through recollecting its history, reevaluating its colonial trauma, and redefining its future (Masri et al., 2024).

The notion that national identity is essentially hybrid and created via a process of cultural translation and negotiation is one of Homi Bhabha's contributions to this conversation. According to him, postcolonial countries create new identities by continuous interactions

between indigenous culture and colonial history rather than only reclaiming pre-colonial identities. As a result, colonial beliefs are frequently both rejected and ingrained in the national consciousness, causing ambivalence (Abou-Agag, 2021).

Malaysia's multiethnic society, mostly Malay, Chinese, and Indian groups, colonial past under the British Empire, and 1957 transition to a post-independence nation-state make it an especially fertile place to study the creation of national identity. Historian Cheah Boon Kheng claims that state narratives such as the Rukun Negara (National Principles) and the promotion of Bahasa Malaysia as the official language are examples of how Malaysia has worked to create a cohesive national identity since gaining independence. Tensions still exist nevertheless over historical memory, ethnic representation, and whose historical account is incorporated into the national narrative (Shamsul, 2001).

Scholars like Gaik Cheng Khoo (2006) have examined how Malaysian literature and film either support or contradict these government narratives in recent years. Alternative histories, individual recollections, or marginalized voices that challenge or muddy state-driven conceptions of identity are frequently reflected in cultural texts. Khoo (2006), for instance, points out that postcolonial Southeast Asian films usually deal with issues of contested memory, cultural relocation, and hybridity, all of which contribute to the formation of postcolonial identity.

In conclusion, postcolonial studies is a process that includes language selection, aesthetics, and global acceptance besides memory and history. How cultural texts support or challenge dominant nationalist beliefs is a key component in analyzing country and identity development.

Past Studies

Owing to the sociocultural context of production, the inherent differences between the two media, and the needs of storytelling for a visual audience, the process of transferring a

story from paper to screen is a transformation rather than a replication, according to scholarly research on literary adaptation. In *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* by Istadiyantha (2017), the methodology of ecranisation by Eneste (1991) is applied to analyse the additions, modifications, and deletions that were done during the adaptation. His research showed that even though important contexts of sincerity, patience, and tolerance were kept, the important narrative arrangement took place in regard to the cinematic pacing, visual representation, and the limitation of film duration. He adds that these modifications are frequently deliberate artistic decisions rather than just technical ones, expressing the director's understanding of the original work and his wish to reach a larger audience.

Putri, Lubis, and Manullang (2021) expand on the application of Eneste's framework in the *Five Feet Apart* adaptation by highlighting specific instances where conversation is restructured, plot events are condensed, and visual cues replace spoken explanation. According to their research, these changes are driven by both practical limitations, such as the need to fit inside a typical film timeline, and aesthetic concerns, including the need to enhance emotional impact using cinematic techniques. The study highlights that when it comes to adaptation, selection and focus are just as crucial as translating from one medium to another.

Within a culturally distinct framework, Hamid, Ali, and Deng (2024) provide a comprehensive comparative analysis of William Faulkner's *Barn Burning* and its Malay film adaptation, *Kaki Bakar*, which was directed by U-Wei Haji Saari. Based on McFarlane and Desmond & Hawkes' theoretical framework, they categorize adaptation adjustment into four groups, which are preserved, added, omitted, and modified parts. The research shows that in Malaysia, themes of ethnic identity and intergenerational struggle and socio-political tension take the place of Faulkner's focus on class conflict in the American South. The film maintains the main narrative arc while relocating it in a distinctively Malay setting. While omissions frequently pertain to setting features that are unrelated to the Malaysian context, additions

include culturally unique gestures, language usage, and moral precepts. This study demonstrates how adaptation may be both creative and faithful, maintaining the story's thematic resonance while rewriting it to fit a new historical and cultural context.

Cathy Caruth's (1996) trauma theory is used by Chow, Abdullah, and Lee (2022) in their essay Art and Real Life: Trauma and Reconciliation in The Garden of Evening Mists to examine how Tan Twan Eng's novel turns the unimaginable aspects of painful memories into artistic expression. They contend that the novel employs Japanese art forms as symbolic means of expressing loss, grief, and reconciliation in post-war Malaya, such as the horimono (traditional tattoo) and the shakkei (borrowed scenery) in Yugiri's garden. By acting as both aesthetic components and therapeutic procedures, these motifs enable Yun Ling, the main character, to process both individual and societal trauma while participating in acts of recollection. By using this study, the connection between art, memory, and healing focuses on how transcultural aesthetics influence the negotiation of historical pain and add to a larger conversation about healing in postcolonial literature.

Besides that, Wang, Lee, and Ho (2025) used the transculturation theory to study how in *The Garden of Evening Mists* Yun Ling tries to find her Chinese Malaysian identity by interacting with the Japanese culture and immersing herself in it. In acculturation, she adopts the Japanese aesthetic sensibilities, in deculturation, she starts to distance herself from her cultural roots, and in neoculturation, she is creating a hybrid, transcultural identity. It is arguable that Yun Ling is obviously embodying a multicultural identity that mirrors the broader dynamics of Malaysia's postwar culture because of her inner conflicted thoughts, which are framed by her colonial trauma, memory, and loss. By putting focus on the transcultural layers, the research can enhance the understanding of how cultural hybridity and individual identity work together in postcolonial situations.

When combined, these investigations strengthen the knowledge that adaptation is a creative process influenced by cultural context, interpretive choices, and medium-specific limitations. A clear analytical framework for analyzing literary-to-film transformations is provided by the recurrent patterns that have been identified: the retention of thematic essence, the omission of culturally or narratively impractical elements, the addition of contextually relevant details, and the modification of structure or characterization. This corpus serves as the academic basis for the current study, which will examine the film adaptation of *The Garden of Evening Mists*, determining what is kept, changed, or left out, and assessing how these modifications affect how colonial memory is portrayed in a postcolonial context.

Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework

This paper examines how Tan Twan Eng's *The Garden of Evening Mists* was adapted from novel to film using a dual-theoretical framework that combines adaptation theory with postcolonial theory. Both the formal process of adaptation, how narrative techniques, character portrayal, and thematic emphases change in the transition from text to screen, and the cultural and historical ramifications of those changes within Malaysia's postcolonial context are the reasons for the necessity of such a dual framework (Hutcheon, 2006). Using a single theoretical framework runs the risk of ignoring the deeper sociopolitical undertones woven into the story or the structural and artistic elements of adaptation.

This study uses adaptation theory to examine how the novel is altered for the film medium, accounting for variation in authenticity, structure, medium-specific tactics, and cultural negotiations targeted at various audiences. Conversely, postcolonial theory frames the adaptation to a wider perspective of colonial memory, hybridity, and identity formation themes that can be often seen in novels and films (Ashcroft et al., 2002). To be able to examine the changes that have occurred during the adaptation from the novel to film, as well as to analyze these changes in a postcolonial perspective, these two frameworks work as a multi-layered analysis when interplayed.

As a part of descriptive qualitative methods, textual analysis is used in this study to conduct further research. There will be a clear and close reading of the novel and the film using the textual analysis method, which helps to note what is changed, removed, and retained while being adapted from the novel to the film (Baxter, 2009). As for the descriptive qualitative approach, it does not only provide a systematic way to document the changes but also allows interpretive insight based on adaptation theory and postcolonial theory. By applying both these methods, this research strives to be able to analyze the process of adaptation as well as the ideological importance of how colonial memory is viewed across different media.

Adaptation Theory

The main theory of this research is the adaptation theory, which studies the ways that Tan Twan Eng's *The Garden of Evening Mists* is changed during the transfer from novel to Tom Lin Shu-yu's film adaptation. It emphasizes the fact that when the novel is adapted to the film, the question is not only about faithfulness but also about the way it is interpreted and recreated (Furlong, 2012). These changes carry an impact on the audience on how they would interpret the story, as the structure, tempo, characterization, and thematic focus of the film change.

The concepts that have been mentioned in Chapter 2, fidelity discourse, intersemiotic translation, medium specificity, narrative transformation, and cultural adaptation, help to explain these changes in a more narrow and specific manner. For example, using the three aspects of fidelity, which are literal, spiritual, and cultural fidelity, it enables the researcher to find out which scenes are kept while examining if the translation preserves the original tone, historical message, and postcolonial themes. The same goes for concepts like medium specificity and intersemiotic translation that focus on the importance of reimagining literary techniques such as internal monologue using cinematic components like lighting, sounds, and mise-en-scène.

Adaptation theory can be viewed as a cultural product in and of itself, one that negotiates meaning differently depending on its medium and audience, instead of viewing it as a derivative work (Leitch, 2008). The important components of narratives, such as setting, symbols, characters, and themes, are able to be studied using the adaptation theory to observe the changes. It helps to understand what is changed, retained, and omitted from the text to the screen.

Postcolonial Theory

In the second framework, which is the postcolonial theory, it allows us to understand how *The Garden of Evening Mists* is able to tackle the legacy of colonialism and the process of Malaysian identity creation following independence. The mechanics of turning a novel into a film are the main emphasis of adaptation theory, but postcolonial theory places those modifications in their historical and cultural context and considers the implication of these changes for how colonial memory, trauma, and hybridity are portrayed (Ashcroft et al., 2002).

According to Darian-Smith (2015), the focus of postcolonial theory is how colonizer-colonized power affects the storytelling and how colonial ideology can be either challenged or upheld in literature and films. As mentioned before, concepts like nation formation, cultural imperialism, representation and voice, ambivalence, hybridity, and colonial memory help in guiding. A major theme in both the novel and the film is memory, as Yun Ling's personal suffering is intertwined with Malaysia's broader postcolonial struggle to remember and make peace with its history. The concepts of hybridity and ambivalence are crucial for analyzing how characters like Aritomo signify cultural negotiation, much like representation and voice help determine who speaks the story and whose opinions are ignored or muted.

By applying postcolonial theory, the research will be asking questions like why the changes carry significance for cultural identity and history memory and how these changes alter the characters, events, or themes. It causes questions like whether the film adaptation maintains the postcolonial issues of the novel or weakens them in order to favor the global audience to rise. In this sense, postcolonial theory presents adaptation as a political act that shapes how Malaysia's colonial and postcolonial realities are remembered and portrayed, rather than just a change of media (Darian-Smith, 2015).
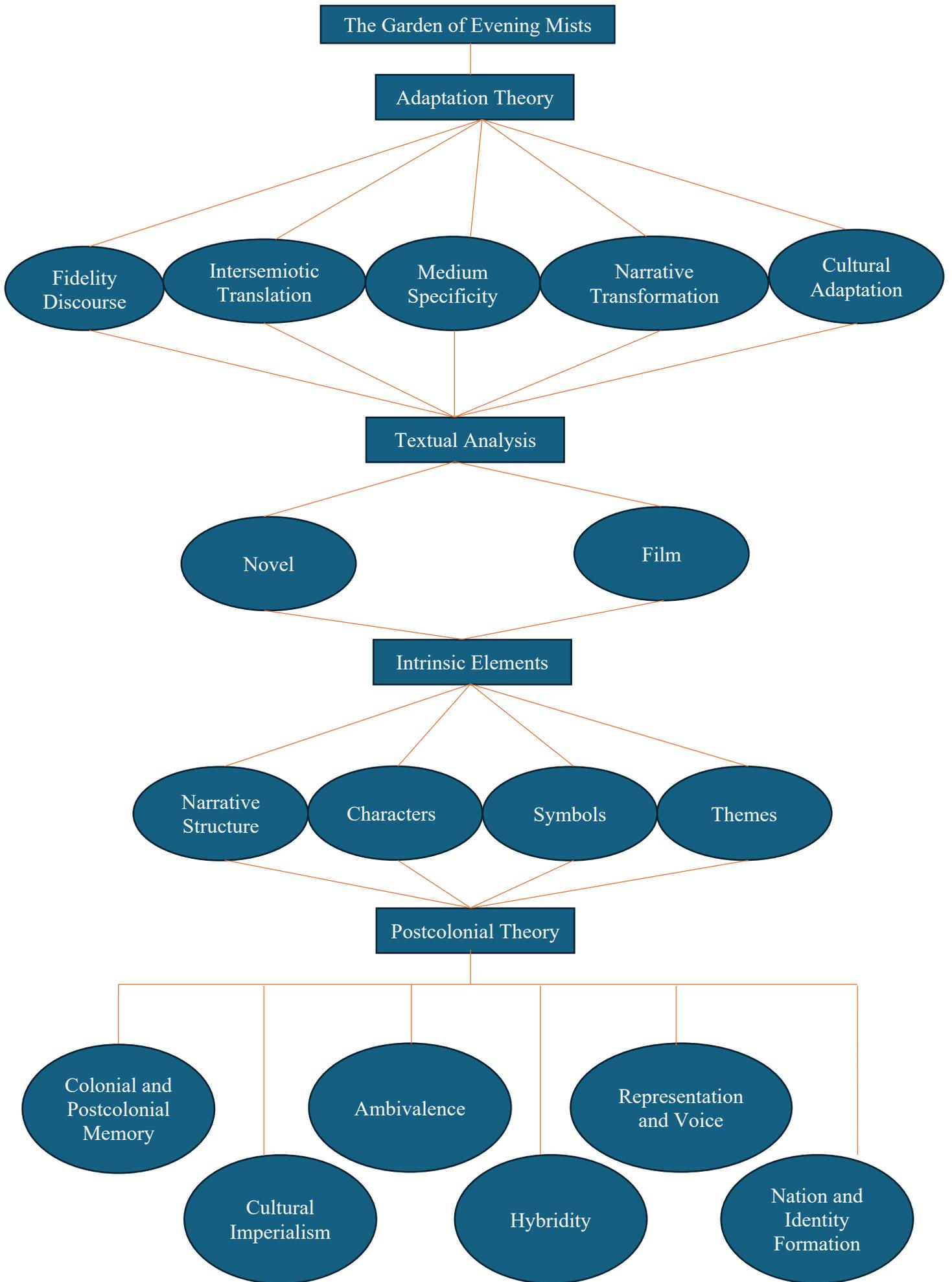
Theoretical Framework

The research will study how *The Garden of Evening Mists* was adapted from the novel to the film by applying both the textual analysis and the descriptive qualitative research design. Using textual analysis, which is an interpretive technique that allows scholars to be able to find meaning inside cultural texts by focusing on how narratives, symbols, and structures build value (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). Since it provides a clear analysis of both the original text and its film adaptation to note the transformation, omission, and retention, it can be classified as suitable for adaptation research.

To improve this research, descriptive qualitative design can be classified as an appropriate method, as it provides a systematic and flexible way to categorize and analyse the data without limiting it to categories or numbers (Doyle et al., 2020). By prioritizing depth above breadth, this method enables the researcher to communicate findings in a comprehensive and narrative manner. The study uses description as a method to show how the adaptation uses formal cinematic choices to negotiate meaning while placing those decisions in larger historical and cultural contexts.

Practically speaking, the study will start by pointing out key components of the novel, like characters, setting, themes, symbols, and narrative structure, and examining how these are rearranged in the film (McFarlane, 1996). Particular focus will be placed on what has been changed, what has been left out, and what has been kept. The dual-theoretical framework will next be used to analyse these findings. Adaptation theory will explain the mechanism of transition, while postcolonial theory will assess the cultural and ideological ramifications of those changes.

This study intends to provide a nuanced analysis that captures the aesthetic and political aspects of adaptation by combining these two methodologies. This analysis will demonstrate

how the novel has been reimagined for the screen and what that reimagining indicates about

postcolonial memory and identity.

The Garden of Evening Mists

Adaptation Theory

Fidelity Discourse — Intersemiotic Translation — Medium Specificity — Narrative Transformation — Cultural Adaptation

Textual Analysis

Novel — Film

Intrinsic Elements

Narrative Structure — Characters — Symbols — Themes

Postcolonial Theory

Colonial and Postcolonial Memory — Cultural Imperialism — Ambivalence — Hybridity — Representation and Voice — Nation and Identity Formation

Chapter 4 Analysis and Discussion

This chapter analyzes the adaptation of Tan Twan Eng's novel *The Garden of Evening Mists* into film by comparing both sources to identify retained, changed, and removed elements. It applies adaptation theory, focusing on concepts that were mentioned in Chapter 2 of this research, like fidelity discourse, intersemiotic translation, medium specificity, narrative transformation, and cultural adaptation to explain the changes in narrative structure, characterization, themes, settings, and symbols. The analysis will then interpret these changes through the lens of postcolonial theory, discussing colonial and postcolonial memory, cultural imperialism, hybridity, ambivalence, representation and voice, and national identity and formation. This dual framework reveals adaptation as a complex cultural negotiation, reshaping narratives of colonial memory and national identity for contemporary audiences.

Narrative Structure

In *The Garden of Evening Mists,* a unique narrative voice that mixed different chronological and psychological levels are used. The majority of the novel is from Yun Ling's point of view, with little voices from supporting characters, such as Magnus. While trying to provide pieces of views of other characters' perspectives, focalization allows readers the exclusive access to Yun Ling's memory, emotions, and beliefs from specific events. When telling Frederick, the historian, about her past, the film applies a more externalized cinematic narrative, mainly through visual storytelling and Yun Ling's voice-over. The changes in the way trauma, memory, and historical context are shown are unavoidable due to the change in narrative mode by compressing and reorganizing the events.

Narrative Transformation

Tan Twan Eng writes a disconnected and complex narrative in *The Garden of Evening Mists* that reflects memory loss and the emotional aftereffects of trauma. Three intersecting

periods are used to tell the narrative of the story. The first is of Yun Ling's battle with aphasia in 1987, the second is her training under Aritomo during the Malayan Emergency in the 1950s, and lastly, her strange flashbacks of the Japanese internment camp. In these changing moments that reject logical coherence, Yun Ling's disordered consciousness can be seen. Yun Ling acknowledges, "Time is eating away my memory. Time, and this illness, this trespasser in my brain." (Eng, 2012, p. 310) suggesting the vulnerability of memory and the challenge of recovering the past. The discontinuous format pushes readers to slowly piece together her memories, mirroring the irregular, repeated, and frequently interrupted process of remembering trauma. As a result, the novel's cycle between the past and present becomes more than just a stylistic decision, as it also represents postcolonial memory, in which human pain and history connect and are unfinished.

To create a more intelligible and emotionally rational plot, the cinema version streamlines this intricate foundation. It mostly concentrates on two timelines, which are the lengthy flashback of Yun Ling's employment with Aritomo and her older self-visiting Cameron Highlands. Three short flashbacks in the film produced by Tom Lin Shu-yu in 2019 around the timestamps of 00:14:27, 00:36:08, and 00:54:41 are passages that are all that remain of the broken recollections of the novel's examination of trauma. Despite their striking visuals, these scenes have less physical depth and more contextual backdrop. A linear emotional arc focused on healing and reconciliation is produced by the film's choice to eliminate the frequent back-and-forth movement between decades and smooth chronological transitions. Although this structural condensing simplifies the story for viewers, it also lessens the intricacy of Yun Ling's internal conflict and the portrayal of trauma as a broken, continuous process. Thus, the film prioritizes consistency and emotional flow over psychological dissonance, replacing the novel's introspective fragmentation with cinematic continuity.

Medium specificity and intersemiotic translation provide an explanation for this structural change from the standpoint of adaptation theory. The film, which is limited to visual and temporal immediacy, must externalize emotion through images, rhythm, and performance, whereas the novel, which depends on language and introspection, can maintain non-linear storytelling and internal focalization (Zhang, 2025). The limitations of visual storytelling are reflected in the reduction of several timelines to two so that it keeps viewers interested, fragmented recollection must be transformed into a cohesive film shape (Huang et al., 2023). According to Jakobson's (1959) theory of intersemiotic translation, meaning invariably changes when switching between sign systems, as a result, the film's condensed storyline is a reinterpretation molded by the expressive potential of cinema rather than a lack of fidelity. This adaptation decision illustrates how the novel's disjointed memory is transformed into a more visually cohesive portrayal of emotional healing by the medium and viewer expectations.

Reordering of Events

Yun Ling's meeting with Aritomo is purposefully delayed in the novel *The Garden of Evening Mists* to give her time to form her political identity, historical background, and inner monologue. Before she ever travels to Yugiri, Tan Twan Eng takes several chapters to establish her as a former War Crimes Tribunal prosecutor and a survivor of Japanese captivity. The reader initially comprehends Yun Ling's intense ambivalence towards Japan and its cultural relics through her thoughts on justice and her connection with Magnus. Her choice to contact Aritomo, who used to be the emperor's gardener, is therefore fraught with emotional and moral dilemma. The meeting can emerge as a complicated moment of reconciliation between the colonized and the colonizer rather than as a romantic or artistic turn thanks to this narrative delay. Tan highlights Yun Ling's dual identities as victims and agents by placing her interaction within the larger postcolonial context. This makes the final apprenticeship and act of tense negotiation rather than an instantaneous metamorphosis.

However, the film reorganizes the scene to emphasize visual storytelling and emotional connection. Long before the film delves into her trauma or political activity, Yun Ling is already shown visiting Yugiri and meeting Aritomo in the first act (Lin, 2019, 00:18:54). By focusing on the tale of the two characters' growing connection, the adaptation follows a cinematic norm that encourages character-based arcs and quick visual interest. In brief dialogue exchanges and archive montages, the historical context, which is her work in war-crimes prosecution and her political disillusionment, is reduced to a backdrop rather than an active narrative drive (Lin, 2019, 00:08:10-00:09:37). The audience's impression is drastically changed by this reordering, as Yun Ling is no longer seen as a politically informed survivor struggling with ambivalence towards Japanese culture but rather as a mourning woman seeking peace. As a result, the story's emphasis is shifted from colonial history to individual recovery.

The idea of medium specificity in adaptation theory, which acknowledges that every medium favors distinct strengths, is reflected in its change (Maras & Sutton, 2000). The novel uses reflection and pauses to show inner pain, but the film focuses on speed, graphic timing, and psychological coherence to keep the audience's attention. Through intersemiotic translation, visual cues that portray Yun Ling's reluctance towards Aritomo inside Yugiri's garden are translated, such as hesitant looks, tonal restraint, and spatial framing (Jakobson, 1959). As a result, the reordering in the adaptation is an intellectual reset rather than a simplification, turning a highly political encounter into a visually expressive and emotionally engaging moment.

Shift in Narrative Focus

The Garden of Evening Mists features multiple subplots with a broad narrative focus, strengthening its postcolonial perspective. Tan Twan Eng devotes two chapters to Magnus' memories of the Japanese occupation and his perceptions of the shifting political climate during the Malayan Emergency (Eng, 2012, ch. 6-8). These chapters situate Yugiri within a

controversial historical background, explaining the ideological clashes between Communist rebels and the colonial officials. Yun Ling's professional identity is also highlighted, for example, her work as a judge, her legal investigations, and her involvement in the prosecution of Japanese war criminals all contribute to the development of her ambivalence towards Aritomo and her ideological attitude (Eng, 2012, ch. 3-5). By integrating Yun Ling's trauma into the larger framework of colonial authority and national change, these political and ideological aspects greatly extend the novel's thematic scope beyond the personal.

By eliminating or condensing the political subplots that serve as the novel's foundation, the film drastically reduces this narrative landscape. Magnus's memories of the conflict are condensed into a single explanation, which takes the place of the novel's lengthy chapters (Lin, 2019, 00:47:28-00:49:39). The Malayan Emergency, which plays a major role in the novel, is merely depicted visually, with no deeper ideological context (Lin, 2019, 00:10:21). Most notably, Yun Ling's post-war tribunal work and legal career are completely eliminated, instead of using political history to convey her animosity towards the Japanese, the film only uses emotional clues, like her sharp reactions to Aritomo during their early exchanges (Lin, 2019, 00:19:17–00:23:16). As a result, the film moves away from the complex socio-political fabric that forms the novel and instead focuses on personal healing, the garden, and the developing bond between Yun Ling and Aritomo.

This change in narrative focus highlights important ideas in adaptation theory, especially narrative transformation and medium specificity. The film prioritizes character-driven arcs and visual narratives over political digressions, focusing on an emotionally cohesive plot that can be explained by its medium specificity. (Chow et al., 2022). Politics-related subplots are simplified or omitted to maintain tempo and visual consistency. The film offers an easier emotional trip by focusing mostly on the personal and creative aspects,

but it gradually loses the postcolonial feature that determines the novel's major element of critique, nationhood, and memory.

Link to Postcolonial Theory

In terms of how memory, identity, and power are portrayed, the narratives in the film undergo shifts with profound postcolonial effects (Kanojia, 2025). When Magnus' political references and Yun Ling's memories from the camp were deleted, the portrayal of the Japanese occupation in the translation was also minimized. Because this novel is primarily about its rich historical memory that is founded on trauma and colonial criticism, the change converted the story into a more concise and emotionally charged narrative. The outcome is a depiction of colonial memory that lessens the political significance of her experience by emphasizing individual recovery over group witness.

Additionally, a reduction in postcolonial complexity is shown in the simplification of Yun Ling's mixed identity and her conflicting feelings towards Aritomo. The film leans towards a romantic conclusion, which restricts interaction with the conflicts of cultural hybridity, while the novel entwines moral ambiguity and historical guilt. When her position as a war-crimes prosecutor is completely ignored, individual emotional moments are prioritized over collective justice and the representation of subaltern voices. Such adaptive decisions change how colonial legacy and human suffering are remembered and told by recasting colonial history as a story of reconciliation rather than resistance, as postcolonial theory cautions (Wilson, 2018).

Character Adaptation and Reduction

Character presence, development, and emotional trajectory are all significantly altered in the adaptation of *The Garden of Evening Mists.* These modifications result from the adaptation's cultural repositioning for a global audience as well as cinematic limitations, including time,

tempo, and audience expectations. Character roles are strategically reshaped to emphasize emotional clarity and visual coherence, rather than merely being reduced, according to the perspective of cultural adaptation and fidelity discourse.

Omission of Key Characters

The political and historical complexity of the story is significantly shaped by a number of supporting characters in the novel. For instance, Magnus Pretorius is essential to understanding the history of Aritomo, the geopolitics of the Highlands, and the Malayan Emergency. His experiences, ideological disagreements, and introspective thoughts regarding colonial decline are described in great detail in Chapters 3 to 4. In the current timeframe of the narrative, Tatsuji, the Japanese historian and a former kamikaze pilot, is equally important. His interviews with Yun Ling provide a meta-functional framework that sparks conversations on historical responsibility, memory, and testimony. The novel's multi-layered engagement with colonial and postcolonial circumstances benefits from both characters.

These characters are either much diminished or drastically changed in the film. Magnus makes a brief appearance, mostly during the arrival at the Highlands (00:11:20) and in two to three scenes where flashbacks are portrayed (00:24:02, 00:47:14, and 01:18:55), but his lengthy political reflections from the novel are cut out. In the opening and closing episodes. Tatsuji's role, on the other hand is much diminished in the film version. The subplot that examines Aritomo's wartime allegiances and ethical complexity is eliminated because Tatsuji is entirely absent. Yun Ling's emotional journey takes precedence over more general geopolitical or moral inquiry as a results of the character's removal and reduction, which streamlines the story for cinematic pacing and visual.

This adaptation decision is consistent with the concept of cultural adaptation. In order to make the novel more approachable for readers from other countries who might not be familiar with the subtleties of Malayan colonial history, characters with complicated political

or historical roles are either minimized or eliminated (Jerome et al., 2016). When the film maintains chosen characters, it shows how cross-cultural influences and visual limits shift narrative focus, all while keeping the main emotional arc.

Adjusted Emotional Arc

The gradual and highly introspective emotional journey is what drives Yun Ling's struggle to deal with pain, memory, and ambivalence in the novel. Her development can be seen in many long and contemplative parts in which she tries to make peace with her own flaws and shortcomings. She reveals early on in the novel that her memories are fragile, saying, "Once I lose all ability to communicate…nothing will be left but what I remember… My memories will be like a sandbar, cut off from the shore … In time they will become submerged … For what is a person without memories?" (Eng, 2012, p. 33). Learning Aritomo's gardening techniques has forced Yun Ling to face her trauma as their relationship develops through psychological landscape marked by resentment and gradual trust, and it is observable by the readers as well.

This progression is greatly condensed in the film. Instead of using lengthy explanations, Yun Ling uses gestures, pauses, and subtle conversation to convey her changing feelings for Aritomo. For instance, early scenes in Yugiri depict her calmly watching Aritomo speak between, her cautious posture and softened countenance, they clearly indicate the beginning of trust (Lin, 2019, 00:29:41). Later, she expressed her emotional openness through eye contact rather than vocal contemplation during a peaceful talk in the forest (Lin, 2019, 00:52:51). In the similar scene, Aritomo's character is flattened into a more emotionally readable figure. The novel's more mysterious, detached portrayal is replaced with views of him slightly smiling or staring. The decisions transform both characters into emotional presences that are easier to relate to.

These modifications are indicative of intersemiotic translation and medium specificity from the standpoint of adaptation theory. While the film must externalize emotion through visual performance, the novel relied on narrative commentary and verbal contemplation. As a result, rather than focusing on psychological paradox, the film promotes aesthetic experience and interpersonal warmth. The postcolonial dynamic also changed by this change. Yun Ling's internal conflict, which is complicated by trauma, memory loss, and cultural ambiguity, is then condensed into an emotionally expressive arc. Thus, the adaptation shows how, in order to maintain visual communication, the film form invariably lowers private emotional complexity.

Romanticization of Aritomo and Yun Ling's Relationship

Rather than being overtly romantic, Aritomo and Yun Ling's relationship throughout the novel is characterized by restraint, ambivalence, and emotional depth. Their relationship develops gradually and is intricately linked to Yun Ling's cultural conflict and pain. She recognizes how Aritomo's discipline and ideas impact her inner life and frequently considers her own paradoxes. She acknowledges the erratic character of her emotional awakening for example, early in the novel, "Once I lose all ability to communicate … nothing will be left but what I remember … For what is a person without memories?" (Eng, 2012, p. 33). Her encounters with Aritomo are framed as a part of a sad, contemplative romance plot because of this emphasis on memory and sensitivity. Even their brief, muted, and purposefully ambiguous sexual encounter is characterized by emotional turmoil rather than passionate pleasure.

On the other hand, Yun Ling's emotional journey is condensed in the film, especially following the tattoo scene. She is seen engaging with Aritomo in a very casual and personal way, caressing him with ease, having physical touch, and displaying physical comfort even though she is completely aware of his Japanese identity (Lin, 2019, 01:08:00). The film shows Yun Ling moving swiftly towards intimacy rather than showing hesitancy or the recurrence of her trauma reactions. This portrayal makes the relationships appear instantly warmer and core

connected, with much less conflict than they had in the novel. The film suggests a less strained, more intimate relationship by using visual cues such as frequent physical contact, expressive body language, and reduced personal space.

These modifications highlight important concepts regarding how interventions are adapted for culture and implemented faithfully. The film modifies its characters for global audiences by using a culturally adapted approach so that it is relatable universally as a romantic story and a more distinct emotional journey. A global audience who may lack knowledge of Malaya's colonial history may find the film more attractive after the modification. From a fidelity standpoint, the romanticization of the film is not a "failure" to adhere to the text but rather a practical reaction to the limitations of cinema. Character ambiguity must be simplified, and emotional stakes must be made visually and narratively clear due to the film's constrained running time. Together, these frameworks demonstrate how, without completely rejecting its intellectual underpinnings, the film turns the novel's psychologically complex connection into a more approachable, physically appealing romance.

Removal of Internal Monologue

The entire narrative framework of the novel is shaped by Yun Ling's inner monologues, which give her continual access to her guilt, worries, and jumbled recollections. Her admission that "In a year—perhaps more, probably less—I won't be able to express my thoughts. I'll be spouting gibberish." (Eng, 2012, p. 30). Early in the novel highlights the issue of memory deterioration. Her inner thoughts, which include her sadness for her sister's suffering, her wrath for the Japanese, and her doubts about her own identity, flow naturally between the past and present. The main way that readers comprehend Yun Ling's psychological fragmentation, post-war trauma, and evolving affections towards Aritomo is through these internal reflections, which are not sporadic additions. The outcome is a very reflective story that is primarily motivated by her awareness.

Without substantially relying on voice-over, which it mostly avoids, the film is unable to achieve this degree of interiority. As a result, Yun Ling's internal tensions are externalized with cinematic devices including physical immobility, long views, silence, and tense facial expressions. For instance, the camera focuses on her expression as she surveys the garden at the scene where she first enters Yugiri (Lin, 2019, 00:16:55). The lack of dialogue encourages the audience to interpret her reaction visually rather than verbally. The film effectively shows the character's early discomfort and mistrust of Aritomo through non-verbal cues and subtle performance choices, such as abrupt silence, a downward gaze, and brief, clipped dialogue, rather than explicitly stating the reasons for her apprehension (Lin, 2019, 00:19:16). Turning Yun Ling into a less analytically self-aware and opaquer person on screen, these scenes portray how the novel's verbal complexity is replaced by emotional clues.

The change effectively demonstrates intersemiotic translation, which translates the novel's rich verbal analysis into visual and auditory signals. The film's dependence on gesture, mise-en-scene, and stillness turns Yun Ling's world to be oblivious as the film focuses on showing rather than telling to portray psychology. The novel is successful in depicting loss and pain through language, however the film's storyline suffers as it is forced to reduce these insights into visual symbolism, demonstrating medium specificity. Finally, Yun Ling's interpretive depth shifts because of multiple media forcing alternate expressive options, rather than a mistake.

Link to Postcolonial Theory

The removal or decrease of crucial characters like Tatsuji, who talked eloquently about political influence, has dramatically affected the novel's postcolonial setting. Characters as such are crucial because they provide a greater understanding of the Japanese occupation, the Malayan Emergency, and the larger ideological confrontation between colonial and postcolonial Malaya throughout the novel. These voices are extremely useful in reconstructing

the memories of Yun Ling's emotional pain in relation to the political, legal, and historical story.

The diverse postcolonial voices are limited when the film's cast is reduced, causing a more individualized and artistic portrayal of colonial memory to be produced. Systemic issues such as justice, accountability, and conflicting national identities are mainly prioritized over Yun Ling's personal journey in recovery.

The postcolonial analysis is important, as these character changes also affect the theoretical features of hybridity and ambivalence. Formed by their respective roles as post-colonizers and survivors, the relationship between Yun Ling and Aritomo in the novel represents cultural friction, trauma, and an unstable hybrid environment. The film silences the cultural and political inconsistencies of the form and softens the ambivalence by recasting their relationship as a more traditional romance, causing the confusion in Aritomo's moral position. By diverting the emphasis away from community and national identity building and towards individual emotional resolution, the adaptation demonstrates how shifting character roles affect how colonial memory, identity, and authority are portrayed.

Thematic Adjustment

In addition to narrative and character changes, the adaptation of *The Garden of Evening Mists* reorganizes several of the novel's primary themes. These subject modifications reflect the needs of a worldwide film audience, as well as the cultural and commercial challenges of translating a historically complex Malaysian novel. They also highlight the disparities in expressive capacities between literature and film. This section uses cultural adaptation and intersemiotic translation to analyse how the film lessens the novel's involvement with war and colonial violence and simplifies historical memory.

Reduction of Political and Historical Context

Yun Ling's pain and *The Garden of Evening Mists'* consideration of the political and historical backdrop are intricately linked. Tan Twan Eng frequently incorporates political memory into Yun Ling's physical experience of violence rather than presenting history in an abstract manner. Her account of being tortured during the Japanese occupation serves as a crucial illustration. For example, "I screamed and screamed as he brought the blade down and chopped the two last fingers off my hand. The screaming seemed to go on and on. In the seconds before I blacked out, I found myself walking in a garden in Kyoto. And then I lost consciousness, and the pain was gone." (Eng, 2012, p. 271). This scene illustrates how memories of empire are still psychologically etched on Yun Ling's body, connecting personal misery to the larger historical violence of occupation. Putting colonial history and the Emergency in dialogue with embodied memory, Yun Ling's imperfect memories of struggle and external opinion are used to analyse political anguish.

The film tends to simplify political and historical complexities by focusing on Yun Ling's emotional recovery rather than the accurate recreation of colonial trauma. Despite the novel's significant attention on this subject, the film merely depicts short, faded, painful recollections to represent the harshness of Yun Ling's background in brief, impressionistic flashes, rather than employing extensive paragraphs to detail the scene (Lin, 2019, 00:14:27). In the novel, Magnus's political views are also not portrayed as well as her legal activities and investigation into war crimes. Instead, short moments like the military checkpoints are used to visually convey political tension without elucidating the underlying ideological dispute (Lin, 2019, 00:10:55). The film shifts the thematic emphasis from historical discourse to romance and personal memory by implying trauma through subtle emotional indicators, such as Yun Ling's stiff posture and tense reactions in early exchanges with Aritomo (Lin, 2019, 00:19:17).

These modifications are a reflection of intersemiotic translation (Jakobson, 1959), which holds that the novel's verbally detailed political pain cannot be entirely translated into a film without interfering with the cinematic flow. While film must externalize information visually and succinctly, the novel's explicit description of torture, political testimony, and legal work relies on the language medium's ability for interiority and explanation. As a result, the adaptation substitutes an emotionally simplified story that emphasizes romance, sensory imagery, and personal healing for political density. This change is also consistent with cultural adaptation, as the film prioritizes approachable emotional themes above complex geopolitical context in order to appeal to a worldwide audience that might not be aware of the historical particulars of the Malayan Emergency.

Simplified Representation of War Memory

The narrative structure of *The Garden of Evening Mists* revolves around memory and trauma. The fragmented, invasive, and multi-layered nature of Yun Ling's memories illustrates how trauma breaks the continuity of awareness. She muses, for example, "Memory is like patches of sunlight in an overcast valley shifting with the movement of the clouds. Now and then the light will fall on a particular point in time, illuminating it for a moment before the wind seals up the gap, and the world is in shadows again." (Eng, 2012, p. 309). This quote from the novel shows how Yun Ling's experience in the camp has imbedded into her present day and influences the way she views the world and herself. It also stressed the irregularity and selective confusion of memory.

The film reduces the complex interiority by externalizing sorrow through brief and stylized visual scenes rather than lengthy narrative reflection. Instant flashbacks of her sister and her in the camp act as a visual reminder of trauma and disturbing memories without fully capturing the character's psychological depth experienced in the novel (Lin, 2019, 00:09:50). In a similar vein, Yun Ling's response to Aritomo is framed through close-ups and lingering

shots (about 00:34:02), demonstrating her introspection and emotional reaction, but the depth of her thought on trauma and memory is mainly lacking. These visual cues provide emotional resonance while condensing the novel's complex moral and psychological experiences.

Yun Ling's verbalized introspective ideas are transformed into visual and auditory symbols in the film, which is an example of intersemiotic translation (Jakobson, 1959) and medium specificity. Where the novel may support detailed examinations of memory, trauma, and moral reflection, the film medium focuses on images, performances, and mood. As a result, the film emphasizes visual and emotional immediacy, simplifying the story while unavoidably reducing the complexity of Yun Ling's memories in terms of ethics, history, and psychology.

Less Explicit Representation of Memory and Trauma

Memory serves as an intrusive and disruptive narrative technique in the novel. Every time a sensory trigger occurs, Yun Ling's memories of the internment camp abruptly surface, usually in the middle of the chapter. For example, "The barbed wire fence protecting the grounds reminded me of my internment camp." (Eng, 2012, p. 41). Tan often breaks the timeline with items such as a tea leaf, the sound of rain, or the scent of smoke, which might suddenly transport Yun Ling back to painful memories of the war. For example, "The smells of the nearby jungle transported me back to the prison camp, I had not expected that. I stopped and looked around me." (Eng, 2012, p. 48). Like post-traumatic recall, these memories are recalled in broken fragments rather than in a linear fashion. Tan's writing frequently switches between the past and the present, highlighting Yun Ling's precarious memory and the psychological price of surviving.

Yun Ling's trauma is depicted in the film in a much more concise and graphic way. The film depicts memory through brief, stylized flashback scenes rather than lengthy memories. For instance, in a scene where Yun Ling is on the bus and passes by the forests at 00:09:39, it reminded her of her past with her sister in the camp where they promised each

other to escape, and Yun Hong mentioned her fascination with Japanese gardens without any narrative explanation. Later, in her early days in the garden, she is suddenly reminded of the camp guards after a scene where Aritomo had her sit with him and focus on the view of the garden and explained to her to focus on things that a human can change (Lin, 2019, 00:34:31). These sequences serve as visual shorthand, rather than rebuilding Yun Ling's inner world, the film presents fleeting sensory experiences that represent trauma without delving into its intricacies. Only bits of the protracted internal conflict are visible to the spectator in the novel.

The medium specificity principle is shown by the transition from a disjointed mental monologue to a condensed visual flashback. Yun Ling's cognitive processes must be externalized because films cannot support long stretches of introspection without using laborious voice-over. In the film, what the novel conveys through introspective writing and psychological disarray is transformed into a sequence of pictures, sounds, and facial expressions. This style of intersemiotic translation transforms psychological trauma from verbal reflection to cinematic motifs. As a result, rather than an in-depth investigation of how memory destroys identity, the film focuses more on emotional clarity. Despite being cinematically consistent, the adaptation decision necessarily reduces the depth of Yun Ling's horrible recollections and their narrative significance.

Link to Postcolonial Theory

The thematic shifts in the film adaptation's representation of colonial trauma and cultural identity have important postcolonial effects. The film reduces the depth of postcolonial memories by condensing the novel's separated, psychologically rich combat memories into brief visual experiences. Using the transition from troublesome memories to aesthetically arranged flashbacks, the confrontation with colonial-era brutality is reduced to symbolic bits, reducing the moral and historical complexity that characterizes the novel's engagement with memory. Trauma, resentment, and cultural appreciation define the contrasts in Yun Ling and

Aritomo's encounter, which represents the novel's continuous moral fight with empire. By muting the novel's questioning of power, guilt, and complicity, the film's smoother emotional narrative diminishes this ambivalence.

The thematic shifts are also altered by the portrayal of hybridity, representation, and national identity. While Tan's novel depicts hybridity as developing from cultural conflict and discomfort, the film reimagines it as a happy artistic relationship centered on intimacy and beauty. Political discourse, such as British colonial domination, communist insurgency, and ethnic strife, has significantly decreased, limiting voices that articulate communal struggle and postcolonial resistance. Characters like Magnus and Yun Ling, who reflect the story's ideological tensions, are neglected, shifting the focus from nation-building to personal rehabilitation. As a result of reducing the sociopolitical depth that situates the work within postcolonial discourse, the adaptation transforms a politically rich study of Malaya's postcolonial identity into a more universalized emotional drama.

Symbolic and Visual Changes

The adaptation, which translates cerebral topics into astonishingly beautiful visual sequences, also alters the symbolic environment of *The Garden of Evening Mists.* The film combines the novel's complex meaning into cinematic images that emphasize aesthetic beauty, using the garden, environmental imagery, and Aritomo's creative philosophy. This process reflects intersemiotic translation, where spoken symbols acquire new meanings when expressed visually, and medium specificity, as cinema foregrounds sensory experience and often simplifies rich symbolic frameworks.

The Garden

Yugiri is portrayed in the novel as a deeply contemplative and philosophical area that serves as a metaphor for time, memory, and discipline in addition to being a real garden. Yun

Ling learns from Aritomo that "A garden is composed of a variety of clocks… Some of them run faster than the others, and some of them move slower than we can ever perceive." (Eng, 2012, p.324). As a space where temporal rhythms, like human, natural, and emotional ones, intersect, this statement summarizes the garden's symbolic function. Viewing Yugiri as a part of Aritomo's worldview and a medium for addressing her trauma and broken memory, throughout the narrative Yun Ling analyzes intensely the meaning of stones, water, routes, and space.

Rather than intellectual discourse, Yugiri is portrayed with a higher emphasis on visual beauty in the film. To emphasize the visual refinement of the space, long panoramic shots of mist over the hills, symmetrical stepping stones, and accurately constructed garden frames are portrayed. Despite its amazing visual show, the video rarely reveals the garden's intellectual foundation or symbolic meaning. Concepts like discipline, patience, and time are not as thoroughly explained by conversation in Aritomo as they are in the novel. Rather, Yugiri's significance is conveyed to the viewer through imagery and Yun Ling's responses, such as her quiet reflection while looking at the garden. As a result, the garden's metaphysical meaning is conveyed visually rather than explained academically.

Intersemiotic translation and medium specificity are reflected in this discrepancy. The film turns these abstract concepts into visual texture, atmosphere, and mood, whereas the novel employs language to create a philosophical story centered around the garden. Detailed explanations of Japanese aesthetics or symbolic gardening concepts (shakkei) are difficult to integrate into films without disturbing tempo, hence, the adaptation condenses conceptual intricacy into visual signals. The transition from overt philosophical instruction to ambient portrayal demonstrates how film converts spoken meaning into sensory experience, streamlining introspection into an approachable, visually stimulating interpretation of Yugiri.

The Tattoo Scene

In the novel, the Horimono scene is one of the most symbolically intricate events, framed not only via physical feeling but also through Aritomo's concept of art, memory, and imperfection. Tan Twan Eng emphasizes the tattoo's metaphorical meaning as a map and an incomplete record of Yun Ling's past while describing the procedure in slow, contemplative detail. Aritomo explains the reason behind the technique, noting, "A horoshi will always leave a section of the horimono empty, as a symbol that it is never finished, never perfect," reaffirming the tattoo's position as a living embodiment of memory, pain, and cultural transmission (Eng, 2012, p. 327). The moment is reflective, morally dubious, and closely related to Yun Ling's tense relationship with the Japanese occupation.

In the film adaptation, the tattoo scene is visually striking but substantially shorter and more emotionally powerful. The cycle emphasizes physical connection and environment rather than Aritomo's creative philosophy or deep symbolism. The moment Aritomo begins the tattooing is condensed into a brief, pleasant discussion, with soft lighting and longer close-ups that move the tone towards sexual tension rather than philosophical throughout (Ling, 2019, 01:10:32). The film also omits Aritomo's explanation of the unfinished harimono, erasing the metaphor of incompleteness that binds the novel's thematic examination of memory and trauma. As a result, the tattoo becomes a visually poetic gesture but one that bears less historical and cultural weight.

This change highlights the process of intersemiotic translation (Jakobson, 1959), in which a text rich in verbal symbolism must be reinterpreted through the visual language of film. It is challenging to communicate abstract ideas like incompleteness, moral ambiguity, and philosophical reflection without lengthy dialogue or narration because film depends on imagery and emotional immediacy. As a result, the adaptation reduces the metaphorical complexity of the novel to physical intimacy, lighting, and mood. The scene also exemplifies cultural

adaptation, transforming a complicated cultural practice into a more universally understandable emotional moment that satisfies viewers' expectations of romance and aesthetic beauty. Together, these alterations reveal how the film reframes the novel's most emblematic scene to match the aesthetic and narrative economy of cinematic storytelling.

Greater Reliance on Visual Storytelling

Aritomo's garden is detailed in great depth throughout the novel, representing both his philosophical outlook and Japanese aesthetic values. From the thoughtfully positioned stones to the arrangement of water and plants, Yun Ling's inner thoughts frequently decipher the symbolic meaning of each component, reflecting her developing grasp of patience, discipline, and harmony. For example, in the novel, when Aritomo says, "This spot where you sit, this is the starting point. This is where the guest views the garden. Everything planted and created in Yugiri has its distance, scale, and space calculated in relation to what you see from here. This is the place where the first pebble breaks the surface of the water. … If you follow the stones' wishes, they will be happy." (Eng, 2012, p. 98). Yun Ling's changing perspective and Aritomo's character are both depicted in the story through these in-depth sections, which let the reader experience her reflective and interpretive mental processes.

Visual storytelling takes the place of these intricate spoken explanations in the film. Without using words, the garden's harmony is communicated through cinematic methods, including symmetrical compositions, balanced framing, and contrasts of sunlight and focusing of the unfinished garden at about 00:34:00. Aritomo's brief explanation after asking Yun Ling 'What do you see?' is mediated in Yun Ling's thoughts. This allows the audience to deduce his discipline, accuracy, and philosophy through performance rather than internal monologue. The garden and its philosophical overtones are immediately experienced through the senses thanks to these visual cues.

The concepts of intersemiotic translation and medium specificity are reflected in this change. Using body language, mise-en-scène, and cinematography to transmit meaning that the novel expresses through introspection, the transition from verbal to visual images is a prime example of how cinema emphasizes sensory experience. According to Jakobson (1959), linguistic cues must be "translated" into visual signals during adaptation, which will unavoidably change the theme development and character depth and explicitness. Thus, the film's use of visual narrative illustrates how adaptations navigate the expressive constraints and advantages of their medium.

Link to Postcolonial Theory

The symbolic and visual modifications in the film version of *The Garden of Evening Mists* dramatically affect the novel's examination of memory, cultural identity, and historical pain. The horimono tattoo serves as a place of contemplation and moral conflict throughout the novel, symbolizing history, personal tragedy, and inheritance. Similarly, the garden reflects discipline, harmony, and philosophical contemplation, connecting Yun Ling's personal experiences to greater postcolonial memory. The intricacies of her negotiations with Japanese occupation, cultural intimacy, and personal grief are depicted in these settings. However, these aspects are aestheticized in the film, like the garden, which is highlighted through cinematography that emphasizes beauty, symmetry, and tranquillity rather than philosophical or cultural depth, and the harimono scene, which emphasizes intimacy and visual poetry over introspection or memorialization. The moral and cultural ambivalence at the heart of the novel is diminished by this change.

These shifts also affect postcolonial representation, voice, and hybridity. Key individuals who communicate historical or ideological positions, such as Magnus or Tatsuji, are excluded or reduced, focusing the story on Yun Ling's personal journey rather than collective or institutional challenges. Negotiation, conflict, and cultural tension are

minimized as hybridity between Malaysian and Japanese culture is reframed as an aesthetic and emotional experience. Ambivalent interactions, particularly between Yun Ling and Aritomo, are romanticized, mitigating the ethical and cultural issues found in the work. As a result, the film prioritizes visual beauty and psychological recovery over historical responsibility, changing the postcolonial terrain into a more universalized, emotionally stirring, but politically simplified story.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how the story, theme, characters, and symbolic elements of *The Garden of Evening Mists* are drastically altered in the film adaptation. The condensing of timelines, rearranging of events, and removal of political subplots streamline the story but narrow interaction with colonial memory and national identity. Thematic shifts foreground romance, aesthetic experiences, and personal healing, while minimizing moral, cultural, and historical issues. Emotional arcs and ideological viewpoints are altered by the omission or reduction of important characters like Magnus and Tatsuji and the romanticization of Yun Ling and Aritomo's connection.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

The film adaptation of *The Garden of Evening Mists* clearly shows the challenges that occur when transitioning textual work into visual forms, especially when the original piece is rich with postcolonial memory and historical memories. Even though the film stays loyal to the narrative and the portrayal of Yun Ling's emotional journey, it naturally compresses, rearranges, and alters events, characters, and symbols in ways that reflect cultural adaptation and medium specificity, and this research shows it through an in-depth study of textual and cinematic elements.

In chapter 4's analysis and discussion, it was shown how narrative structures are transitioned to make room for visualization. In the film, to create a story that prioritizes connection to emotions and real experience over political depth, the novel's chronological layers, internal monologues, and flashbacks are simplified. Characters like Aritomo and Yun Ling were mainly romanticized to be perceived as emotionally appealing, while characters like Magnus and Frederik are left out. Moreover, symbolic elements such as the garden and nature imagery are professionally enhanced to translate complicated themes into understandable ones, highlighting the concepts of adaptation theory. As for the postcolonial point of view, the representation of colonial and postcolonial memory is impacted by the shortening of timelines and political subplots. Even Yun Ling's voice was simplified and reduced, causing the effect of her past suffering to be less painful. In this way, the adaptation emphasizes the argument between artistic interpretation and commitment to postcolonial theory by acting as a venue where history, memory, and identity are viewed through the prism of cinematic accessibility.

While this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the adaptation of *The Garden of Evening Mists,* it has several limitations. Firstly, the study is limited to one novel and its film adaptation, which may not fully represent the broader practices and challenges of ekranizatsiya across different genres and cultural contexts. Secondly, the research focuses

primarily on the narrative, thematic, characterization, and symbolic aspects of the adaptation, potentially overlooking other cinematic elements such as cinematography, music, and acting that also contribute to the film's interpretation of the novel. Thirdly, the analysis is based on available secondary sources, and while it includes detailed comparisons between the novel and film, it may not capture all the nuances of the adaptation process, particularly those related to the director's creative vision or the practical constraints of filmmaking. Lastly, the study is constrained by its reliance on textual analysis, without incorporating audience reception or critical reviews, which could provide additional perspectives on the success and impact of the adaptation.

In order to expand this study, future researchers could apply a few different approaches. Besides *The Garden of Evening Mists,* the scope of the research could be expanded to other novels and their film adaptations in different genres or even cultural contexts, which can help in identifying the changes and difficulties of adaptation in general. Moreover, the researchers could conduct their research by incorporating the cinematic components as well when conducting research, such as the acting, sound design, music, and cinematography, as they provide a deeper understanding of how the film communicates. To get a better and deeper understanding of the changes, interviews of the directors and production teams will help understand the creative choices made and practical limitations that were faced. Lastly, feedback from the audience will also go a long way, such as a one-on-one interview, as it may provide an impactful viewpoint on how well the film portrays the novel's cultural, historical, and emotional aspects. When taken as a whole, these approaches would be very helpful for future studies to dig deeper into a better understanding of the complex process of film adaptation.

To sum up, the adaptation of The Garden of Evening Mists demonstrates the complex interplay between literature and film, showing how cinematic imperatives modify narrative, character, subject, and symbolism. The research shows that adaptation is a creative and

interpretive process that balances audience response, artistic expression, and historical accuracy. In the end, this study adds to the larger discussion about narrative translation, postcolonial memory, and the cultural importance of literary adaptation.

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