

## Transcending Temporality Beyond Genre: Examining Adaptation Misfit in Martin Scorsese's Adaptation of *Freedom in Exile* into *Kundun*

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### Abstract:

*Freedom in Exile* by the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama is considered one of the defining texts in an understanding of major tenets of contemporary Buddhism and its survival under colonial transgression in the postcolonial world. Therefore, the text essentially becomes the mouthpiece of the modern history of the major Buddhist community and the modern Buddhist philosophy, for it comes from the supreme leader of Buddhism. While the claim that Martin Scorsese's *Kundun* is an adaptation of *Freedom in Exile*, it is apparent that the major episodes of the movie are the depiction of the abstracts from the book. Adaptation and reworking of any literary text have become a trend as well as a challenge, especially when it comes to a film adaptation. While the current paper seeks to explore the timeless contours of the Dalai Lama's autobiographical work *Freedom in Exile*, it attempts to draw a connection between the text and the film, besides examining the ambiguity in the latter's depiction. Dwelling on the analytical speculation of the interconnectivity of both, it fathoms the loophole of depiction in the movie. Furthermore, the paper intends to postulate the timeless spirit of the film besides the mother text despite abundant adaptation misfit.

**Keywords:** film adaptation, infidelity, exile, autobiography, adaptation misfit.

The film adaptation is a form in which a literary text is reformulated into a screenplay for film or Television series. Adaptation in cinema came into existence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with early cinema adaptation of the Bible such as Lumiere brothers' *La Vie et Passion de Jesus Christ* in 1897 and Alice Guy's *La Vie de Christ* in 1899. Literary adaptation has been majorly identified into three types first is of classical texts, which is a more connoted adaptation, second is of plays, and the final is of contemporary texts that do not include in the classical text but remain within the canon of popular fiction. Among these, second is considered the most authentic (Hayward 4). In the literary adaptation criticism, the film adaptation considers the fidelity criticism in which equivalence is the main discourse. Dudley Andrew suggests, "Fidelity of adaptation is conventionally treated in relation to the "letter" and to the "spirit" of the text, as though adaptation were the rendering of an interpretation of a legal precedent" (100). Adaptation renders multiple texts as compared to the original single-author text:

. . . because they are a mise-en-abime of authorial texts and therefore of productions of meaning. To explain: there is the original text (T<sup>1</sup>), the adapted text (T<sup>2</sup>), the film text (T<sup>3</sup>), the director text(s) (T<sup>4</sup>n), the star text(s) (T<sup>5</sup>n), the production (con)text (T<sup>6</sup>n), and finally the various texts' own intertexts (T<sup>7</sup>n). Such a chain of signifiers makes it clear that the notion of authorship becomes very dispersed. (Hayward 6)

The more recent development of film adaptation is more linked with economic consideration. Hence it is the primary reason that altered text is not authentic comparing the original text. The current paper sincerely focuses on adaptation fidelity and transformation. Further, it will closely examine the similarities and contrast in original text and adaptation.

The autobiographical text *Freedom in Exile* of the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama is the phenomenal text in the canon of Tibetan literature that exhibits the Dalai Lama's ordinary life, selection as the Dalai Lama, Chinese intrusion, and initiation of Tibetan exile. Martin Scorsese's directed film *Kundun* attempted to give a sincere replica of the original piece. But the movie failed to exhibit the complete essence of the text as an article *Scorsese in the Land of Snow: The Splendor of Kundun* examines, "Scorsese's failure to do full justice to the historical and moral of modern Tibet constitutes a serious blemish on what would otherwise have been his greatest masterpiece . . ." (Casillo 35). The adaptation disregards the details provided by the text. It doesn't suitably explore the geo-political trajectories of the text. The text offers geo-political framework with the help of maps that show the geographical location of Tibet and its neighbours as the geo-political portrayals are intrinsic for the understanding of the contours of any nation. But, the movie adaptation presents limitations to recording such information due to its nature.

The text narrates through the first-person narrative and keeps the details of the Dalai Lama's teaching to enlightenment and growing through a normal human to revered persona, Chinese incursion and details of upheaval. The text recounts people's grief losing their belief and losing the Dalai Lama. But the film selects a section of details and reformulates those into different perspectives which wholly focus on a single facade. The compact bulk of text contains the minute details of the Potala palace to Norbulingka and his close relation to teachers, schedules of his teachings, China's intrusion, then escape into exile and later on close monitoring to Tibet after living in exile. Progressively as cinema engrossed with fame and profit, many transformational shifts has been taken by cinema adaptation as it is examined that ". . . The *cinematographe* as a machine is a willed transformation of nature for purpose and profit" (Andrew 24). Text records the Dalai Lama as a normal human being later his selection as the supreme spiritual figure that leads him to attain enlightenment to hold the supreme secular leader. The film's perspective revolves only around the political issues based on multiple texts formulated in film making. But the landscape of Morocco is marvellously captured to portray the replica of the Tibetan landscape because Tibet was forbidden to filming as Gavin Smith calls it "a uniquely metaphysical spectacle" (Chan 90). The cinematic portrayal of adaptation brings a different perspective than the original text accompanying camera and sound effects.

The adaptation also shows several lapses and thus is unable to capture the aesthetic quality of the text. But the selective use of the events according to their relevance hints that film adaptation does not fully deal with the text. The aesthetic value of a text shows the merits that make certain text literary. The aesthetic value of a memoir resides in the fact that

it records the specific moments from the narrator's memory. This presents, on the one hand, the selective nature of memoir. It also helps the narrator establish self-identity concerning social, cultural, and ethnic values. The text explores Dalai Lama's identity deeply rooted in Tibetan cultural and social practices, but *Kundan* deals more with the atrocities faced by Tibetans in the political context and is concerned less with exploring cultural and ethnic dimensions. At the same time, it is considerably evident that ". . . fidelity in adaptation virtually impossible" (Stam 56). Thus, it delimits the spectator's perspective, which is fully available to the reader of *Freedom in Exile*.

The film captures scenes that do not emulate the events described in the text. The text details the Dalai Lama's spiritual and political life, but the film shows only the chronology of partial details. There is a scene in the film when the search party come to the Dalai Lama's house, his mother open the door, and he notices them and exchange glance from far away. The text does not provide such a meeting, but the Dalai Lama knew who they were and says, "The child recognise him and called out 'Sera Lama, Sera Lama'. Sera was Kewtsang Rinpoche's monastery" (Gyatso12). This kind of lapse can be noticed in other scenes; when the Dalai Lama was leaving Tibet and crossing Lhasa, he closed his eyes and visualised the image of his home; this is also not a part of the text. The adaptation is not a complete viewpoint of the *Freedom in Exile* but an amalgamation of the original text and subtext such as script writer's text, screenplay writer's visualisation and, importantly, the director's perception. The scenes prove this in the film; before leaving Tibet, Dalai Lama dreamt of the pond where he played with fish filled with blood and the words he heard from his people, such as the murder of the parents by their own children. These are not written in the book. Likewise, the film ignores the spiritual dictation, which is part of the whole text. Even when he was leaving Tibet during his temporary stay at various places, he preached to people about Buddhist teaching. The viewpoint of the scriptwriter replaces the writer's perspective. The book contains the details of conversation with Nehru regarding the help supposed by Tibetans and also the help provided by America which also not become part of the movie. Louis Giannetti opines "adopts the same criteria for categorization and outlines the 'literal', 'faithful', and 'loose' adaptation associate in order of the fidelity to the original text" (qtd. in Kaltra 3). This conveys the same issue of faithfulness toward adaptation. For the audience who are already cognizant of the original text, the stances of doubt always remain in their mind. It could be possible that cinema is more engrossed with a profit due to this filmmaker changing some original content and bringing some exciting amalgamation in original content.

The film is set on a linear timeline as opposed to the original text. The text does not follow a linear narrative, such as when the Dalai Lama is in exile or in his own country, he shifts narrative from the past through thinking or dreams. And also, if the film was made for political purposes, then there are many incidents which are not mentioned in the film, such as communist China's cruelty which the Dalai Lama accustomed through the International Commission of Jurist as he claims:

I fully accepted what I had heard: crucifixion, vivisection, disembowelling and dismemberment of victims was commonplace. So too were beheading, burning, beating to death and burying alive, not to mention dragging people behind galloping horses until they died or hanging them upside down and throwing them bound hand and foot into icy water. (Gyatso 136)

In contrast, if it was for spiritual and religious propaganda, it does not satisfy the requirements fully. The film repose the Dalai Lama at its centre and employ him as a superhero. The Dalai Lama himself discarded this by saying he is simply a lama who acquires knowledge through his teachers.

### Conclusion:

While a written document converges a visual time-bound genre, it brings the issue of loyalty due to the textual content. As film adaptation progressively rose in popularity, film theory turned toward fidelity criticism. The whole bulk cannot be captured in the time-bound genre of film. At the same time, it concerns economic consideration. A film adaptation is a creative work that forms a new document by transforming and creating new dialogues and scenes from the original text; hence, it contains multiple interpretations that have their own understanding. But when the adaptation is a concern, especially to life narrative or autobiography, the moral ethic should be more inclined to the original to maintain authenticity. In the case of Martin Scorsese's *Kundun*, it is certainly an honest representation of the *Freedom in Exile*, but the deletion of the original text and reformulated adaptations texts lapse much of the original source. The graphic image of a film strikes far more than a written document, leading to ignoring the original source. Hence the film should keep a sincere record of the original text. The film's audio track and background music compels the suitable ambience for the presenting events and grip the setting of overwhelming boisterous events. So a film based on realistic text should not keep such loopholes that raise disbelief. But it could be entirely wrong to proclaim *Kundun*'s highly accepted appreciation, but this study conveys these misfitting attributes of the adaptation. Its concern is to clarify the insight of the filmmaker and some ignored part of autobiographical essence.

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