

# CONTROVERSIES OVER CONTEXTUAL CHANGES: AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF DAT RUNG PHUONG NAM (2023) FILM ADAPTATION

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## Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore the controversies that emerged from the contextual changes in the film adaptation of *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* (2023). The study addresses three main research questions. First, it analyses how the film's contextual changes differ from the original novel and how they are received by the viewers and critics. Second, it evaluates the effect of these controversies on the film's box office performance and critical recognition. Third, it reveals the challenges and opportunities that arise from adapting literary works to the screen, based on the case of *Dat Rung Phuong Nam*. The study uses a combination of textual analysis, audience reception studies, and industry perspectives to enhance the understanding of the complex dynamics involved in adapting literary masterpieces to the cinematic medium. The study also highlights the nuances of audience engagement and the implications for commercial outcomes and critical reception.

**Keywords:** Contextual Changes, Film Adaptation, Controversies, Literary Works, Critical Reception

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## Introduction

The cherished Vietnamese novel *Đất Rừng Phương Nam* (The Southern Land and Forests), authored by Doan Gioi in 1957, continues to resonate with audiences across generations. Set amidst the backdrop of the Vietnamese resistance war, the narrative follows the protagonist, An, a young boy whose life takes a transformative turn as he journeys through the Mekong Delta after being separated from his family (Gioi, 1957). Subsequently, in 1997, the novel was adapted into a highly acclaimed miniseries, capturing the essence of An's odyssey and the picturesque landscapes of the region (Saigoneer, 2022). Fast forward to 2023, director Nguyen Quang Dung unveiled a fresh cinematic interpretation, reigniting interest in this classic tale. However, the latest rendition stirred debate due to its departure from the original text. This study aims to delve into the controversies surrounding these contextual modifications, exploring their implications on the film's reception and the broader discourse on literary adaptation.

Primarily, an examination of the extent of the film's deviations from the novel is imperative. Reports from news outlets indicated that director Dung aimed to offer a "more faithful reflection of the text" compared to the miniseries (Saigoneer, 2022). Nonetheless, both viewers and critics observed substantial alterations, particularly the subdued portrayal of the war's brutality (Tuoi Tre News, 2023).

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Scholars contend that fidelity in adaptation is multifaceted, with differing perspectives on whether adherence to the source material should be stringent (Hutcheon, 2006) or if directors should exercise creative liberties to transpose a narrative across mediums (Leitch, 2009). Analyzing the specific alterations in *Đất Rừng Phương Nam* (2023) will provide insights into the director's artistic vision and its resonance with audience expectations.

Furthermore, comprehending the reception of these deviations among viewers and critics is essential. Reports from news outlets documented a mixed response, with some lauding the film's breathtaking visuals and emphasis on the natural beauty of the Mekong Delta (Tuoi Tre News, 2023). However, others expressed disappointment with the toned-down depiction of the war's adversities, contending that it diluted the emotional impact of the original novel (Saigoneer, 2022). Studies on audience reception suggest that viewers often compare adaptations to their mental image of the source material (Hutcheon, 2006). Analyzing reviews and discussions on social media platforms can elucidate how the contextual changes in the film resonated with audiences and the emotional essence they associated with the original literary work.

Moreover, investigating the ramifications of these controversies on the film's commercial success and critical acclaim holds significance. While specific box office figures are not readily available, reports from news outlets indicate that the film performed reasonably well (Tuoi Tre News, 2023). However, the critical reception may have been influenced by the discourse surrounding the contextual modifications. Studies on film adaptations underscore the role of critics in shaping audience perceptions (Leitch, 2009). Examining critical reviews will unveil how the film's fidelity to the source material contributed to its overall assessment and commercial performance.

This article seeks to address three key research questions:

RQ1: To what extent do the film's contextual changes deviate from the original novel, and how have these changes been received by viewers and critics?

RQ2: How have the controversies surrounding the film's contextual changes impacted its commercial success and critical acclaim?

RQ3: What do the controversies surrounding *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* reveal about the challenges and opportunities of adapting literary works to the screen?

In essence, the controversies surrounding *Đất Rừng Phương Nam* (2023) offer valuable insights into the intricacies and opportunities inherent in adapting literary works for the screen. This study endeavours to navigate these complexities, shedding light on the delicate equilibrium between honouring the original material and crafting a captivating cinematic experience.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Overview of Film Adaptation***

The cinematic reimagining of literary works is a dynamic and complex process that involves translating and transforming narrative content from one medium to another (Alqadi, 2023). Scholars have debated the definition and significance of film adaptation, as well as the challenges and opportunities it poses for both filmmakers and audiences. According to Naremore (2000), adaptation is an act of interpretation and translation that changes the original text in various ways, depending on the artistic choices and goals of the filmmakers. Filmmakers must balance the fidelity to the source material with the creative possibilities of the visual medium, such as the use of sound, image, and editing (Fussfeld Cohen, 2014). Film adaptation can also enrich the storytelling experience, by offering new insights and perspectives on familiar stories and by exploring the unique features and dynamics of the cinematic form (Sanders, 2015). Stam (2000) also argues that adaptation is a multifaceted phenomenon that involves a constant tension between the loyalty to the original text and the innovation required for a successful cinematic adaptation. Therefore, the definition and significance of film adaptation provide a framework for understanding the intricacies and controversies of the cinematic reimagining of literary works, a theme that is central to the analysis of *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* (2023) and its contextual changes.

### ***Historical Perspective on Adaptations***

The trends of film adaptation have changed over time, reflecting the artistic, cultural, and audience factors that influence the process of transforming literary works into cinematic works (Murray, 2008). Scholars and filmmakers have noted a shift in the approaches used to adapt literature to the screen, from a more faithful and literal stance to a more creative and interpretive one (Elliott, 2003). This shift is also related to a wider cultural change towards a more visual society, where storytelling is not only about replicating the original work but also about captivating the audience through imaginative reworking (Stam, 2000). This research is situated within this changing context, offering a chance to examine how modern adaptations deal with the balance between fidelity and creativity.

Some adaptations have had a significant impact on audience expectations and the direction of film adaptation trends. These adaptations, such as *The Godfather* (Coppola, 1972), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Mulligan, 1962), and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Jackson, 2001-2003), have not only received critical praise but have also established standards for how audiences view the adaptation process. These adaptations have shown that successful adaptations do not always need to follow the source material closely; instead, they can make creative changes that improve the cinematic experience while keeping the main themes of the original work (Corrigan, 2011). The effect of these adaptations on audience expectations is very important, as they have helped to create a more refined understanding of the possibilities for cinematic reworking. As *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* (2023) joins this cinematic conversation, it faces the legacy created by these adaptations, generating curiosity and criticism regarding how it will add to, or challenge, the existing audience expectations (Elliott, 2003; Corrigan, 2011).

### ***Theoretical Framework***

To comprehend the complexities of film adaptation, it is necessary to examine various theoretical frameworks that inform the translation of literary works to the cinematic medium (Cahir, 2014). Adaptation theories offer perspectives that enable scholars and filmmakers to analyze the intricate connection between the original source material and its cinematic reworking (Hutcheon, 2006). The idea of fidelity, a key concept in adaptation theories, investigates the extent to which a film preserves the narrative, characters, and themes of the original work (Stam, 2000). This viewpoint is supplemented by the notion of intertextuality, which stresses the interrelatedness of texts across different media. Intertextual approaches examine how a film interacts with and refers to its source material, creating a rich network of meaning that surpasses the boundaries of the individual works (Hutcheon, 2006). Moreover, the development of transmedia storytelling theories has broadened the discussion beyond the limits of a single film or text, acknowledging that adaptations can exist within a wider narrative ecosystem, incorporating multiple media platforms to tell a coherent and extensive story (Jenkins, 2006).

The importance of adaptation theories becomes especially evident when applied to the analysis of contextual changes in film adaptations, such as those under examination in *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* (2023). Fidelity theory provides a basis for evaluating the degree to which the film's contextual changes diverge from the original novel (Johnson, 2017). By assessing the faithfulness to key elements, such as plot, characters, and themes, scholars and critics can discern the nature and consequences of the adaptation process (Sanders, 2015). Intertextuality theory is vital in understanding how the film engages with the source material, recognizing not only explicit references but also subtle connections that contribute to the overall narrative fabric (Edgar-Hunt et al., 2010). Transmedia storytelling theories widen the analytical scope, enabling researchers to explore how the film fits into a larger narrative landscape, including its potential impact on other adaptations or related media (Stam, 2000; Hutcheon, 2006; Jenkins, 2006). As the controversies surrounding *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* unfold, the application of these adaptation theories becomes essential in deciphering the challenges and opportunities inherent in the cinematic reinterpretation of literary works and in unravelling the intricate dynamics of contextual changes in film adaptations.

### ***Contextual Changes in Film Adaptation***

In the field of film adaptation, the concept and classification of contextual changes are essential for understanding how narratives change from page to screen. Contextual changes refer to modifications in various elements such as setting, historical accuracy, character traits, tone, and style. These changes can vary from minor details to major deviations that alter the essence of the original work. To analyse the contextual changes in *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* (2023) in depth, a classification framework is needed. This involves categorizing changes into different types, such as narrative restructuring, character reinterpretation, or stylistic shifts. By defining and classifying contextual changes, researchers can gain a detailed understanding of how the film differs from the original novel and identify patterns that contribute to the controversies surrounding the adaptation.

The director's vision and creative choices are key factors that influence how a novel is adapted into a film, resulting in contextual changes that reflect the artistic considerations of the filmmaker (Hutcheon, 2006). The director brings a personal perspective, style, and interpretation to the story, making decisions that may differ from the original novel. These decisions can affect the narrative innovations, visual

aesthetics, and thematic emphasis of the film adaptation. For example, Scott (1982) created a unique cyberpunk world in his film adaptation of *Blade Runner*, based on Dick's (1968) novel "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?" The director's vision and creative choices can shape the visual storytelling, narrative structure, and character portrayals in the film, affecting the nature and extent of contextual changes. By analysing the artistic considerations in *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* (2023), the researcher can gain insight into the director's intentions, exploring the reasons and implications of the deviations from the source material and their impact on the cinematic experience.

Another layer of influence on contextual changes in film adaptations is the cultural considerations, which include audience expectations and regional nuances. Filmmakers must balance between being faithful to the source material and meeting the expectations and sensibilities of the target audience (Cahir, 2014). Cultural context, such as societal norms, historical background, and cultural symbolism, can affect how a literary work is interpreted on screen. For instance, Lee (2000) blended Chinese martial arts and a poetic narrative style in his film adaptation of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, based on Wang's (1942) novel of the same name. The film was tailored to appeal to both Eastern and Western audiences. In the case of *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* (2023), understanding how cultural considerations play a role is essential for interpreting the controversies surrounding contextual changes. By examining audience reactions and regional perspectives, the researcher can uncover the challenges and opportunities that arise when adapting a literary work that has cultural significance onto the cinematic stage.

Some film adaptations have achieved success by making significant contextual changes to the original works, demonstrating the possibility of innovation within adaptation (Murray, 2012). One notable example is Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo and Juliet* (1996), which transposed Shakespeare's classic tragedy to a contemporary, vibrant setting, with modern language and visual stylization. Luhrmann's bold contextual changes not only revitalized the timeless tale but also earned critical acclaim and commercial success, showcasing the potential for innovation within adaptation. Similarly, Francis Ford Coppola's adaptation of *The Godfather* (1972) involved notable contextual alterations, compressing and rearranging events from Mario Puzo's novel. These changes, driven by a commitment to cinematic storytelling, resulted in a masterpiece that not only preserved the essence of the original work but also stood as a testament to the transformative power of adaptation when executed with a clear artistic vision.

However, not all contextual changes in film adaptations are well received by audiences and critics, especially when they diverge from the expectations and integrity of the source material. A prime example is the adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* into a film trilogy by Peter Jackson (2012-2014). The decision to expand the relatively concise novel into three films introduced significant contextual changes, including the addition of characters and storylines. While some appreciated the extended exploration of Middle-earth, others criticized it as unnecessary and deviating from the spirit of the source material. Ridley Scott's adaptation of *Prometheus* (2012) also faced criticism for its contextual changes, particularly in its connection to the *Alien* franchise. Fans and critics alike expressed dissatisfaction with the altered mythology and unanswered questions, highlighting the challenges that filmmakers face when straying from the established context of a beloved literary work. These instances underscore the delicate balance required in navigating contextual changes, emphasizing the need for filmmakers to consider audience expectations and the integrity of the source material when embarking on adaptation projects like *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* (2023).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design to comprehensively explore the multifaceted aspects of controversies over contextual changes. The qualitative component involves textual analysis of both the original novel and the film adaptation to identify and categorize contextual changes. This analysis will be guided by established adaptation theories, focusing on fidelity, intertextuality, and transmedia storytelling. Additionally, interviews with the director, cast, and production team will be conducted to gain insights into the artistic considerations and creative choices that influenced contextual changes.

The qualitative component involves the collection and analysis of reception data. Viewers' responses will be gathered through surveys and social media sentiment analysis to gauge their perceptions of the film's contextual changes. Critical reception will be assessed through a comprehensive review analysis, considering professional critics' opinions from reputable sources. The data will be subjected to content analysis to identify patterns and correlations, providing a nuanced understanding of how the film's contextual changes have been received.

The sample for qualitative analysis will consist of key scenes from the film and corresponding sections from the original novel, selected through purposive sampling to ensure representative coverage of contextual changes. For interviews, a purposive sampling approach will be employed to engage with individuals directly involved in the adaptation process. The qualitative component will involve a diverse sample of viewers and critics, ensuring a range of perspectives, exploring the trends in audience and critical responses.

Data collection for textual analysis will involve a systematic examination of the novel and film, cataloguing contextual changes and documenting their significance. Interviews will be conducted in-person or virtually and transcribed for thematic analysis. Surveys will be distributed through online platforms, and social media comments will be collected for sentiment analysis. Critical reviews will be sourced from reputable databases and platforms.

Qualitative data from textual analysis and interviews will be analysed thematically, identifying recurring patterns and themes related to contextual changes.

This research adheres to ethical guidelines, ensuring the privacy and informed consent of interview participants. Viewer survey data will be anonymized, and critical reviews will be utilized respecting copyright regulations. The research will be conducted with transparency and integrity, promoting the responsible and ethical conduct of academic inquiry.

## RESULTS

### *Dat Rung Phuong Nam: A Case Study*

Dat Rung Phuong Nam by Doan Gioi is a novel that has a profound historical and cultural significance in Vietnamese literature. The novel tells the story of An, a young boy who searches for his father, a revolutionary fighter, in the southern region of Vietnam during the French colonial rule in the late 1940s. It not only depicts the personal journey of An but also the historical and cultural context of the

region. The story shows the challenges and struggles of the people during a critical period in Vietnam's history, as well as the identity and resilience of the nation. Gioi's skilful description of the natural and cultural diversity of the south adds to the novel's acclaim as a classic of Vietnamese literature. His writing is a testament to the power of storytelling in preserving and conveying the collective memory and struggles of a nation.

The story has been widely praised and celebrated in literary and cultural contexts. It is admired for its vivid portrayal of characters, historical events, and the lush landscapes of southern Vietnam. It has become a cultural icon, resonating with readers across generations. Its exploration of themes such as patriotism, familial bonds, and the human cost of revolution has contributed to its enduring relevance. Within the literary community, the novel has received praise for its narrative depth and emotional resonance. Moreover, it has become an integral part of Vietnamese literary education, reflecting its acknowledged importance in shaping the cultural consciousness. The novel's enduring popularity and critical acclaim set the stage for heightened expectations and scrutiny when it comes to its adaptation to the cinematic medium in *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* (2023). The film adaptation is tasked not only with translating the narrative faithfully but also with navigating the intricate historical and cultural nuances embedded in the novel. The controversies surrounding contextual changes in the film, therefore, unfold against the backdrop of a literary work deeply embedded in Vietnam's cultural and historical fabric.

Doan Gioi 's literary work, *Dat Rung Phuong Nam*, has undergone two prior adaptations prior to the 2023 film rendition. The initial adaptation took the form of an 11-episode television series titled *Dat Phuong Nam (Song of the South)*, directed by Nguyen Vinh Son and broadcasted in 1997. Despite facing limitations in budget and technical resources, the series earned acclaim for its faithful portrayal of the novel's characters, events, and landscapes. Notably, it secured the first prize for the Year's Best TV Series at the 1997 National Film Festival, as recognized by the Vietnam Cinematography Association. Additionally, the series featured a memorable theme song composed by Pham Duy and performed by Le Binh.

The second adaptation emerged as a stage musical titled *Dat Rung Phuong Nam*, directed by Tran Minh Ngoc and presented by the Ho Chi Minh City Ballet Symphony Orchestra and Opera in 2019. This musical ventured into creative reinterpretation, melding elements of *cai luong*, contemporary dance, and folk music to showcase the cultural diversity of the southern region. The performance aimed to highlight themes of love, family, and patriotism present in the original novel.

The 2023 film adaptation of *Dat Rung Phuong Nam*, helmed by Nguyen Quang Dung, is anticipated to offer a more faithful representation of the novel compared to its predecessors, particularly in capturing the natural and cultural context of the southern region. According to the director, the film will address previous resource constraints by incorporating scenes of the jungle omitted in the 1997 television series. Authentic locations, costumes, and dialects are promised to authentically reflect the historical and cultural setting of the novel.

However, the film adaptation introduces certain contextual changes, sparking debates among viewers and critics. Notably, the addition of a new character, Xinh, has been met with controversy, as she accompanies An and Co on their journey. Furthermore, alterations to events and details from the novel,

such as the fate of An's father and the involvement of the French colonial forces, have drawn criticism for being deemed unnecessary, inconsistent, or disrespectful to the original work.

*Dat Rung Phuong Nam* (2023) represents the cinematic adaptation of Doan Gioi's revered novel, providing a portrayal of life in the southern region of Vietnam during the late 1940s under French colonial rule. Directed by Nguyen Quang Dung, the film is a collaborative production involving HK Films, Galaxy Play, Tran Thanh Town, Kim Entertainment, and Hana Entertainment. The ensemble cast includes esteemed actors such as Huynh Hao Khang, Bui Ly Bao Ngoc, Do Ky Phong, Tuan Tran, Tien Luat, Bang Di, Tran Thanh, Hua Vi Van, Tuyen Map, Mai Tai Phen, Huynh Dong, Bich Ngoc, Cong Ninh and Hong Anh. Initiated in 2017 with the acquisition of adaptation rights, the film maintains the original title of the novel, a departure from the 1997 television series. Principal photography spanned locations in Ho Chi Minh City, Dong Nai, and several Mekong Delta provinces, capturing the diverse essence of the southern region. Filming commenced in December 2022 and concluded after 48 non-consecutive days in March 2023.

*Dat Rung Phuong Nam* (2023) emerged as one of the highly anticipated releases of the year, fuelled by the source material's literary acclaim and cultural resonance within Vietnamese literature. The film generated buzz for its expansive production, creative direction, and an ensemble cast of notable figures. Commencing with a press conference on September 20, 2023, the film held early screenings from October 13 to October 15, leading to its official release on October 16, 2023. While the film received a mixed response from audiences and critics, with accolades for its cinematography, music, and performances, critiques centred on contextual changes, dialogue, and special effects. The film faced accusations of distorting historical facts and showing disrespect to the original work. Despite the controversies, the film achieved commercial success, grossing 138.4 billion VND by October 31, 2023, surpassing its production budget of 40 billion VND.

### ***Analysis of Contextual Changes in Dat Rung Phuong Nam (2023)***

The film *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* (2023) unfolds against the backdrop of the late 1940s, a period marked by the First Indochina War and Vietnam's subjugation under French colonial rule. Capturing the life and struggles of southern region inhabitants, particularly the revolutionary resistance against French oppression, the film delves into key historical events. These include the August Revolution in 1945, the south's reoccupation by the French in 1946, the Viet Minh uprising in 1947, and the establishment of the Republic of Cochin China in 1948. However, the film introduces historical inaccuracies and distortions, such as the inclusion of the French Foreign Legion, the presence of the American CIA, and the portrayal of the Viet Cong. Criticism from viewers and critics has centred on these inaccuracies, with claims of misleading narratives, disrespect, or potential political motivations.

Adapted from Doan Gioi's timeless novel published in 1958, the film *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* (2023) pays homage to the southern people, their history, and culture. The narrative, framed through the perspective of An—a young boy in pursuit of his revolutionary fighter father—has solidified the novel as a Vietnamese literary masterpiece. Applauded for its vivid portrayal of characters, historical events, and the diverse natural and cultural landscape of the southern region, the novel holds a revered status in Vietnamese literature. However, the film adaptation introduces deviations from the original work, incorporating elements such as the addition of a new character named Xinh, a young girl accompanying



An and Co on their journey. Alterations to events and details, including the fate of An's father, the role of the snake-catcher, and the involvement of French colonial forces, have drawn criticism for being perceived as unnecessary, inconsistent, or disrespectful to the integrity of the source material.

A notable transformation observed in the cinematic rendition of *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* pertains to the portrayal of the central character, An. The novel depicts An as a young, innocent, and inquisitive boy who gradually confronts the harsh realities of life and warfare, evolving through various encounters. His loyalty, bravery, and compassion shine through, as he becomes a symbol of determination for his country. In the film adaptation, however, An assumes a more mature, confident persona, marked by adventurous spirit and a strong sense of justice and patriotism. Displaying enhanced skills and knowledge, he adeptly navigates challenges and dangers. While some audience members and reviewers commend the film for crafting a more captivating and heroic character in An, others criticize it for veering away from the original charm and depth that characterized An's personality and development in the novel.

Another substantial alteration in the film lies in its tonal shift compared to the novel. The literary work maintains a realistic, tragic, and emotional tone, capturing the hardships and sufferings endured during the colonial period. It delves into nuanced explorations of identity, family, friendship, and love. Conversely, the film opts for a more adventurous, humorous, and romantic tone, amplifying elements of action, comedy, and romance. It simplifies and exaggerates certain plot points and conflicts, injecting a heightened dramatic and entertaining quality. While some viewers and critics appreciate the film for its lively and engaging adaptation, others express discontent, citing its perceived superficiality and sensationalism as reasons for disapproval.

The reception of *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* among audiences shows a diverse range of reactions. Aggregated data from various sources, such as online reviews, social media comments, and audience ratings, shows mixed sentiments. While some viewers appreciate the film's artistic vision, innovative storytelling, and the addition of new elements like the character Xinh, others voice discontent with perceived deviations from the original novel. Notably, online platforms and social media discussions serve as dynamic spaces where viewers engage in passionate debates, sharing their interpretations of the film's contextual changes and expressing how these alterations have influenced their overall viewing experience.

Critical evaluations of *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* further highlight the contentious nature of contextual changes. Film critics exhibit a spectrum of opinions, reflecting the diversity of perspectives within the cinematic community. While some critics applaud the film for its bold reinterpretation, citing the addition of new characters and narrative twists as refreshing, others scrutinize these changes as unnecessary embellishments that stray from the essence of Doan Gioi's original masterpiece. These divergent opinions among critics not only underscore the subjective nature of film analysis but also highlight the challenging terrain filmmakers navigate when adapting revered literary works to the screen. The controversies surrounding the film's reception reveal the intricate interplay between audience expectations, artistic choices, and fidelity to the source material, offering valuable insights into the challenges inherent in the adaptation process.

### ***Impact on Commercial Success and Critical Acclaim***

The film *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* has achieved notable success at the Vietnamese box office, notwithstanding the debates surrounding its contextual alterations compared to the original novel. As reported by Box Office Vietnam, the film has amassed a revenue exceeding 138.9 billion VND as of October 31, 2023, positioning it as the highest-grossing Vietnamese film of the year and the second highest of all time, trailing only *The House of No Man* (2019). Additionally, it outperformed previous adaptations of the novel, including the 1997 TV series and the 2019 musical, both in terms of ratings and earnings.

A pivotal factor contributing to the film's commercial triumph was the star power of its cast and crew, notably Tran Thanh, who not only portrayed the character Bac Ba Phi but also co-produced the film. Recognized as one of Vietnam's most popular and influential celebrities, Tran Thanh's extensive fan base and social media presence drew considerable interest in the film, with viewers eager to witness his performance and interpretation of the adaptation. Furthermore, the film benefitted from an effective marketing strategy encompassing teaser trailers, posters, interviews, and a viral music video featuring Honored Artist Trong Phuc and a 300-member choir. Despite these successes, concerns were raised about the film potentially distorting the cultural and historical identity of the Southern region, with accusations of catering more to urban and young audiences than their older, rural counterparts. Such critiques ignited impassioned debates on social media and online forums, where enthusiasts of both the novel and the film clashed over differing opinions and interpretations.

The film *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* has garnered diverse reviews and ratings from reputable sources, underscoring the varying viewpoints of critics and audiences alike. According to IMDb, the film holds a rating of 6.4/10 based on feedback from 35 users (IMDb, n.d.). On MoMo, it received a rating of 3.5/5 from 1,200 user reviews (MoMo, n.d.), and on Moveek, the film holds a rating of 2.9/5 based on 1,100 user reviews (Moveek, n.d.). Positive reviews highlight the film's captivating cinematography, authentic portrayal of the southern landscape and culture, and commendable performances, particularly from the child actors (VOH, n.d.; Afamily, n.d.; IMDb, n.d.).

### ***Challenges and Opportunities in Adapting Literary Works to the Screen***

The film adaptation of *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* faced a series of challenges that are common to filmmakers who adapt literary works to the screen. One of the main challenges was finding the right balance between fidelity and creativity. Filmmakers had to decide how much they wanted to adhere to the original novel and how much they wanted to modify or add to suit the cinematic medium. This is a crucial decision, as being too faithful could result in a bland or outdated film, while being too creative could offend or disappoint the loyal fans of the original work. This challenge reflects the constant tension between preserving the essence of the source material and creating a cinematic experience that can stand on its own.

Despite these challenges, the film adaptation of *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* also offered valuable insights into successful adaptation strategies. Filmmakers seized the opportunity to emphasize the core themes and values of the original work. By focusing on these key elements, the adaptation was able to retain the spirit and message of the novel while ensuring its relevance and appeal to modern audiences. This strategy reflects a way of leveraging the timeless aspects of the source material to create an adaptation that resonates across different time periods and cultural contexts.

Moreover, the film showed the effectiveness of introducing new elements and perspectives. By adding new characters, subplots, and twists, filmmakers were able to enrich the narrative, providing a novel and engaging experience for viewers. This strategy not only prevented the adaptation from becoming a mere copy of the original but also expanded its appeal to a diverse audience. The introduction of innovative elements allowed the film to stand as a unique work while still maintaining a connection to the beloved source material.

In essence, the challenges and opportunities observed in the adaptation of *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* underscore the delicate balance required in adapting literary works for the screen. Filmmakers need to navigate challenges with a nuanced approach, drawing on the timeless themes of the original work while introducing innovative elements that enhance the cinematic experience.

## **Conclusion**

The examination of *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* provides a comprehensive understanding of the film's contextual alterations from the original novel and shed light on the challenges and opportunities inherent in adapting literary works to film. The analysis indicates notable deviations in the film, encompassing aspects such as the character portrayal of An, the narrative tone, and the depiction of historical events. These factors prompted considerable controversies among viewers and critics, who presented diverse perspectives on the film's balance between fidelity and creativity. Additionally, the analysis underscored the influence of contextual changes on the film's commercial success and critical reception, showcasing its ability to attract a broad and varied audience while simultaneously garnering mixed reviews. Furthermore, the examination revealed insights into the broader challenges and opportunities inherent in adapting literary works to film, including the delicate balance between fidelity and creativity, capturing the author's voice and style, visualizing the story and setting, emphasizing core themes and values, integrating new elements and perspectives, and collaborating with the author and fans.

The *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* case study contributes significantly to broader discussions surrounding film adaptation, offering insights into prevalent issues and debates arising during the translation of literary works to the cinematic medium. This case study illuminates the intricate and diverse nature of the adaptation process, emphasizing its subjectivity and dynamic reception. Moreover, the study enriches our understanding of the adaptation phenomenon within the Vietnamese context, highlighting the cultural and historical significance of the original work alongside the artistic and societal implications of the film. Consequently, the *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* case study provides valuable lessons and insights for filmmakers, critics, and audiences engaged or interested in the adaptation of literary works to the cinematic realm.

This analysis of Dat Rung Phuong Nam and its contextual changes lays the groundwork for further inquiries in film adaptation controversies. A possible direction for future research is to examine the varied reactions of different audience segments to contextual modifications in film adaptations. Exploring how various demographic groups respond to and interact with such changes could reveal valuable information about the complex dynamics of adaptation reception. Furthermore, future research could also investigate the role of cultural and historical contexts in shaping controversies over film adaptations, leading to a more holistic understanding of how specific socio-cultural factors affect audience feedback and critical evaluation.

Based on the controversies around Dat Rung Phuong Nam, future research in the field of film adaptation should also investigate the changing role of social media and online platforms in influencing public discourse. Studying the impact of digital spaces on the spread of opinions, debates, and criticisms related to film adaptations could shed light on the contemporary landscape of audience engagement. Additionally, researchers may also examine the relationship between contextual changes and the wider cinematic landscape, looking into trends in adaptation strategies and their implications for the film industry. Moreover, analyzing the collaborative processes between filmmakers, authors, and fan communities in the adaptation journey could offer valuable insights into successful strategies for avoiding controversies and ensuring a more harmonious reception.

In conclusion, the study of "Dat Rung Phuong Nam" has uncovered various aspects within the controversies surrounding film adaptation. By identifying areas for further exploration and suggesting future research directions, this analysis opens the door for a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities inherent in adapting literary works to the screen.

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N/A

### **Declaration**

I declare that this research is our original work and has not been submitted for publication elsewhere.

I declare that we have no competing interests that could influence the objectivity of this research.

I declare that I am the sole author of this research.

All data used in this study is included within the manuscript and its appendices.

Anonymized data used in this study will be made available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

This research did not involve human subjects or animals.

### **Conflict of interest statement**

I, the author of this research paper titled "Controversies Over Contextual Changes: An In-depth Analysis of *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* (2023) Film Adaptation," hereby declare the following regarding conflicts of interest:

**Financial Disclosures:** None of the authors have received any financial support from the filmmakers, distributors, or any entities associated with the production of the film *Dat Rung Phuong Nam* (2023) or the original novel. I have no financial interests that could potentially influence the objectivity of our research.

**Employment and Affiliation:** None of the authors are currently employed by or affiliated with any film production companies, distribution companies, or literary publishers that may have a stake in the success of the film or the novel.

**Personal Relationships:** None of the authors have any close personal relationships with the filmmakers, novelists, or any other individuals directly involved in the creation of the film or the novel.

Should any potential conflicts of interest arise in the future, we will promptly disclose them to the journal editors.

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