



Literary Studies

# Chinese Immigrant Cultural Identity Acceptance in *Turning Red* Film

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This research aims to reveal the portrayal of Chinese cultural identity acceptance in *Turning Red* film. The writer employs qualitative research and content analysis as the method in conducting this research. It is also analyzed by using the theory of cultural identity by Stuart Hall. The result shows that *Turning Red* film portrays the third-generation Chinese immigrant as someone who preserves cultural values through her unwavering devotion to traditional Chinese eating practices, respect for her parents, preservation of the family's great reputation, and regard for her ancestors. The film also portrays Meilin's journey in accepting her Chinese roots. Meilin initially perceived the red panda as a curse due to its impact on her desire for independence and personal freedom. However, as time passed, Meilin's acceptance grew due to the unwavering support of her peers and family. A moment of acceptance occurred when Meilin's family ultimately settled with her choice to keep the red panda amidst chaotic arguments. As a conclusion, Meilin as a third-generation Chinese immigrant, proves that Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity, which states that identity is going to keep adapting to a variety of situations, is valid.

**I. INTRODUCTION**

According to the official dictionary of the Indonesian language (KBBI), culture can be defined as an intricate combination of concepts, customs, and established practices that have evolved over time, ultimately settling into deeply ingrained behavioral patterns that are difficult to change. In the context of daily life, individuals commonly confuse the concept of culture with that of tradition. In this instance, tradition is defined as the observable customs and practices exhibited by a given society (Sumarto, 2019). On the other hand, Sagala (as cited in Sumarto, 2019) provides a definition of culture as an intriguing concept that pertains to the manner in which individuals conduct themselves, acquire knowledge, experience emotions, form beliefs, and endeavor to conform to their cultural norms. Behavior and social indicators are utilized to define the identity and reputation of a given society.

The concept of cultural identity is characterized by its fluid character, as it experiences ongoing changes that arise from the influence of historical, social, and cultural factors. The enduring importance of history is obvious, though subject to the impact of memory, imagination, narrative, and mythology (Hall, 2015). From Hall's perspective, cultural identity does not originate from within or is determined; instead, it is the result of ongoing exchanges and negotiations between people and their cultural surroundings (Hall, 2015). Identity is defined as a compilation of self-representations that individuals create, encounter, and convey within a certain cultural and interactional setting (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Identity is essential to the adaptation and acculturation of immigrants. While there are multiple aspects to which immigrants must

adapt to the host society, the most important is how they define cultural identity (be it through national identity, ethnic heritage, or both) and their relationships with others in their new nation, especially the dominant cultural group (Liu, 2015).

First Chinese immigrants often integrate into their home culture before adopting a new one. As a result, migrants must adapt to new cultural practices and learn the host language (e.g., English) to integrate into mainstream society (Liu, 2015). Born into the host society, second generation migrants possess the benefit of being adequately informed about the cultural practices of the host country and having a proficient grasp of the host language (Liu, 2015). A thorough understanding of the quest for a cultural homeland by Chinese immigrants is both theoretically and practically significant (Liu, 2015). The Chinese communities, encompassing immigrants from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, and mainland China, are the most populous and dynamic ethnic groups with non-native English speakers globally. Chinatowns remain prevalent in nations that accept immigrants, including the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Canada, the Netherlands, Australia, and New Zealand (Liu, 2015).

Approximately seventy five percent of Canada's population growth is attributable to immigration (Immigration et al., 2023), which has contributed to Canada becoming one of the world's greatest multicultural nations. Hence, it is understandable that cultural issues are prevalent in Canadian society and history. In the current era of globalization, cross-cultural interaction has become more prevalent, resulting in acceptance of cultural identity that is intriguing to study. Additionally, a person's cultural identity is impacted by the media's and films' increasing influence of global culture. Recent films are frequently a reflection of both social cultural dynamics and serve as platforms for distributing important social messages. Therefore, film is a relevant medium in exploring how cultural identities are accepted.

One of the biggest film productions in the world, The Walt Disney Company (Abigail, 2022), has also produced films that portray the acceptance of cultural identity, particularly Chinese cultural identity. Through partnership with Pixar, they released a film with drama genres and coming of age with characters of Chinese-Canadian descent in 2022 entitled *Turning Red*. *Turning Red* is the first animated film from Disney and Pixar that talks about the acceptance of cultural identity process by a teenager and directed by Domee Shi and written by Domee Shi, Julia Cho, and Sarah Streicher. The film follows Toronto-based thirteen-year-old Chinese-Canadian Meilin Lee. The most significant themes of the *Turning Red* film revolve around the complex process of cultural identity acceptance. The film explores the difficulties as the main character, Meilin Lee, struggles to undergoes a magical transformation into a red panda when overwhelmed by intense emotions. The major themes explored in the story include the complex processes of adolescence, the influence of multicultural environments on the growth of one's identity, and the embracing and accepting one's Chinese cultural identity amid the evolving cultural landscape.

In *Turning Red*, Meilin Lee encounters the complexities of learning about herself alongside the difficulties associated with puberty and her familial deity-granted magical power to transform into a red panda. The red panda symbolizes the bridging of Meilin's Chinese cultural identities, representing the conflicts and harmony that occur from the difference between her family's traditions and the modern society she is a part of. The red panda serves as a poignant symbol of Meilin Lee's inner struggles and her attempts to negotiate her cultural identity, as she faces the obstacles of puberty and societal expectations. The film employs this fictitious element to convey a profound story about the challenges of maturing in different environments and the difficulties of discovering oneself and self-acceptance.

The writer aims to examine how Meilin Lee accepts her cultural identity, focusing specifically on her relationship with the red panda in *Turning Red* film. Through an in-depth examination of Meilin's encounters with this unfamiliar beings, this study endeavors to unravel the red panda's symbolic significance as a representation of her gradually coming to terms with and eventual embrace of her Chinese cultural heritage. Therefore, this research will be examined using a cultural identity approach by Stuart Hall to uncover the nuanced layers of Meilin's cultural identity acceptance. Stuart Hall's theory provides a theoretical basis for analyzing the process of constructing, negotiating, and embracing cultural identity in the context of Meilin's journey in *Turning Red* film.

The writer discovered five previous research studies that examined the same corpus as this study,

which is the film *Turning Red*. The writer discovered studies that focused on literary psychology studies, one on visual studies, two on semiotic studies, and one on cultural identity studies. The first study, entitled *Analisis Karakter Orang Tua di Film Turning Red Guna Membantu Orang Tua Dalam Pengembangan Pola Asuhnya Terhadap Pembentukan Karakter Anak Usia Dini* by Ambar Putri Ramadhani, Widya Lestari, Nia Karmila Putri, Karunia, Zalmi Hayati, and Fuaddilah Ali Sofyan from Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah Palembang in 2022. This study aims to describe and analyze the characters of Mei-Mei parents who are useful for helping parents in developing their parenting patterns for the formation of early childhood characters in the *Turning Red* film. The result of this study shows that positive or healthy parenting is the way in which parents treat their children and is visible through the actions and words of parents that positively influence the growth of the child's personality and sense of independence (Ramadhani et al., 2022). Moving into a more visual perspective, the research entitled *Film Animasi Turning Red Dari Konteks Ikonografi* by Salsabila Putri and Indra Irawan in 2022. The purpose of this study is to use qualitative analytical methodologies to examine the characters in this animated picture. The result of this study shows that based on the iconographic study analysis method, the cultural and character values in the *Turning Red* animation can be seen from the visual aspects presented and the way of communicating (Putri & Irawan, 2022).

Two studies explore the semiotic aspects of the *Turning Red* film, entitled *Analisis Poster Film Turning Red dalam Teori Semiotika Roland Barthes* by Arini Asyifa Nugraha, Arief Johari, and Gumilar Pratama in 2022, and *The Representation of Fantasy Comedy in Movie Posters Entitled Turning Red Using Semiotics Theory* by Alifania Diah Anggraeni and Devi Hellystia in 2022. The first study aims to capture the meaning and information of a poster's visual employing descriptive qualitative research methods and Roland Barthes' semiotics. By using Roland Barthes' theory, the results shows that the semiotic analysis of this animated film poster contain the meaning of the red panda animal as a representation of puberty, especially in girls, pastel coloring on the Canadian city setting background gives a bright and happy impression so that the audience can easily identify the animation genre on the poster (Nugraha et al., 2022). The purpose of the second study is to identify the depiction of fantasy comedy and explain the sign system used to portray fantasy comedy in *Turning Red* movie posters. This study discovered ninety eight data, which are presented in three brief statements. First, there are twenty eight data for the signifier and signified, followed by fourteen data for verbal signs and forty four data for non-verbal signs. The third part consists of twelve color meanings from the advertisements for the film *Turning Red* (Anggraeni & Hellystia, 2022). Lastly, the thesis research that takes a cultural identity approach entitled *Identity Clash in Chinese Diaspora in Film Turning Red* by Naurah Nabila Afiandy from State Islamic University Jakarta in 2023. The research investigates how the film depicts the identity conflict between the main character and her parents, as well as the challenges that the Chinese diaspora faces in practicing Chinese and Canadian cultures. Three aspects of the identity clash between the main character and her parents were identified by the researcher: different opinions on popular culture, traditional parental beliefs regarding sex education, and overprotective parents. Furthermore, there are seven aspects regarding the main character's struggle with practising two cultures: being 'mom's perfect girl' instead of a 'independent girl,' Chinese stereotype, activity after school, sexual education issues, different traits in problem-solving, the dilemma of two contrast cultures, and racism (Afiandy, 2023).

## II. METHOD

This research will limit its focus on cultural identity acceptance by the main character, Meilin Lee, in *Turning Red* film. The research will be examined by Stuart Hall's cultural identity approach to unravel the dynamics of Meilin Lee's identity is constructed, negotiated, and embraced within the dynamic framework of the red panda's cultural context. This research has two main focuses for analysis. First, to know how is Meilin, as a third-generation Chinese immigrant, portrayed in the *Turning Red* film. Second, to find out how does Meilin accept her Chinese roots. The writer uses the qualitative method with descriptive analysis. According to (Sugiyono, 2011, as cited in Fathanah et al., 2022), descriptive qualitative method is a research method based on the philosophy of postpositivism used to analyze the condition of natural objects (as opposed to experiments) where the researcher is the key instrument of

combined data collection methods, data analysis is inductive/qualitative, and the results of qualitative research highlight meaning over generalizations. In addition, qualitative research focuses more on words rather than numbers, this is used because qualitative research examines social problems that occur naturally, evaluates situations, and comprehends the meaning of problems that occur in society (Walia, 2016). The current research utilizes the Qualitative Content Analysis design as a methodological approach for conducting the analysis. Samsu (2021) states that content analysis, also referred to as documentary analysis, is a research methodology that can be employed to examine sociological and psychological variables. This research employs qualitative content analysis in order to better analyze and understand the cultural identity acceptance process in the *Turning Red* film. Moreover, this research also shows how does Meilin's accept her Chinese roots.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The characters who got involved in this analysis are Meilin Lee, Ming Lee (Meilin's Mother), Jin Lee (Meilin's Father), Grandma, Mr. Gao, Miriam, Abby, Priya, and Tyler. It will examine how their actions and dialogues in the film portrays and constructs the process of cultural identity acceptance. The quotation of dialogues and the actions and interactions from the scene of the film will be added to this research as evidence to support the writer's arguments in solving the research problems above. The writer will incorporate quoted dialogues, actions, and interactions from specific scenes in the film as evidence to strengthen the writer's arguments in addressing the research questions mentioned earlier. Meilin Lee takes an important role in the *Turning Red* film, playing an essential part in both affecting and driving the storyline. The film demonstrates a female character who grapples with the complexities arising from the Chinese cultural roots associated with the red panda. In navigating the challenges of accepting her identity, Meilin's personal experiences and choices take a crucial role in shaping the story of the film and its overall significance.

#### Portrayal of Meilin Lee as Chinese Immigrant

The writer identifies four keys aspects that prominently portray Meilin as Chinese immigrant in *Turning Red* film: honor Chinese tradition, respect for elders, maintain good family reputation, and being an overachieving student. These cultural elements provide compelling instances that illustrate the ways in which cultural identities are portrayed. This study seeks to illuminate the complexities of cultural identities and their implications within the narrative of the film by conducting a comprehensive analysis of these cultural aspects in relation to Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity.

As the child of immigrants, Meilin Lee has to maintain her cultural origins while adapting to the dominating Western culture in her Canadian environment. In this subchapter, Meilin's ability to deal with the complexities of Western culture while holding to her family's rich Chinese traditions is illustrated. Meilin exemplifies the way an individual can maintain their cultural identity in the face of challenges from other cultures, and how their daily practices reflect their attempts to maintain their cultural origins. Through her interactions with family, her choices, and her understanding of cultural practices, the writer obtains valuable insights into the significant strategies she employs to weave together the tapestry of her origins and present reality. This section illustrates Meilin's desire to honor her heritage while establishing her own path in Western land, revealing the interplay between tradition and changes that shapes her identity growth. This can be seen in the monologue below:

Meilin : *The number one rule in my family? Honor your parents. They're the supreme beings who gave you life, who sweated and sacrificed so much to put a roof over your head, food on your plate, an epic amount of food. The least you can do in return is every single thing they ask. Of course some people are like, "Be careful. Honoring your parents sounds great, but if you take it too far, well, you might forget to honor yourself."* Luckily, I don't have that problem. (00:00:52)

The first monologue illustrates a respect for Chinese traditions in more individualistic Western cultures. Meilin's statement "*honor your parents*" emphasizes the significance of respect for parents and strong family values in Chinese culture (Yun et al., 2019), and Meilin clearly conveys this value. This also includes devotion for parental orders and expectations, which are frequently highly valued in Chinese culture. Meilin firmly adheres to this rules, asserting that she effortlessly manages the complex balance

between honoring her parents and honoring herself. While there are people who advise against neglecting one's own self-respect in favor of extreme reverence for one's parents, Meilin clearly declares that this is not a problem. Thus, Meilin's statement about respecting parents shows her strong commitment to Chinese traditions in her family, and her steady attitude reflects how Meilin understands and respects family values in Chinese culture. In addition to honoring one's parents, maintaining family reputation is also an integral element of Chinese tradition. This monologue demonstrates the importance of maintaining the family's good reputation:

Meilin : *I know what it looks like. I am my own person. But that doesn't mean doing whatever I want. Like most adults, I have responsibilities. It's not all about me, you know? I do make my own moves, it's just that.. Some of my moves are also hers.* (00:06:46)

The monologue presented by Meilin demonstrates her acknowledgement of the significance of family responsibilities in shaping her identity. Meilin highlighted in her monologue that while she perceives herself as an independent individual, she is concerned of the duties and commitments she owes to her family, particularly her mother. Meilin's statement, "*I do make my own moves, it's just that.. Some of my moves are also hers*" demonstrates that Meilin understands that her actions are affected by the values applied by her mother. So, as mentioned by Bedford & Yeh (2019), sustaining the good reputation of the family is considered important, her attempts to maintain the reputation of her family demonstrate Meilin's honor and gratitude for her cultural heritage. This demonstrates how strong the influence of Chinese traditions and family values is in shaping Meilin's perspective and behavior. Apart from maintaining the good reputation of the family, maintaining Chinese traditions can also be done by worshiping one's ancestors (Hu & Tian, 2018). As seen in the following dialogue:

Mom : *Sun Yee, revered ancestor, guardian of the red pandas. We humbly thank you for protecting and guiding us. Especially Mei-Mei.*

Meilin : *May we continue to serve and honor you and this community.*

All : *Always.* (00:07:38)

Chinese traditions of worshiping ancestors are honored in mentioned dialogue. Meilin and her mother genuinely and respectfully thank Sun Yee, a honored ancestor and red panda guardian for her protection and guidance towards Meilin. Meilin emphasized her desire to stay committed in her service and respect for Sun Yee and their community. Meilin's choice to go immediately home to worship rather than join her friends at karaoke reflects Meilin's respect for her ancestors and commitment to maintaining Chinese traditions while staying in a Western culture. As part of their Chinese identity, Meilin and her family acknowledge the importance of honoring their ancestors and maintaining community ties. Therefore, this dialogue demonstrates Meilin and her family's attempts to maintain a balance between their diverse cultures. In addition to honoring the ancestors as an example of preserving Chinese traditions, Meilin additionally maintains Chinese culture through enjoyment of Chinese eating habits. In the next example, Meilin eats with her family and uses chopsticks in (01:02:14).

Food is an essential part of Chinese culture, as mentioned by Simoons (2014) that due to the importance of food in everyday life, Chinese people are frequently portrayed as having a food-centric culture. In Chinese culture, it is also common for people to offer others a meal in order to create new friends or strengthen existing bonds (Ma, 2015). While in the Western culture it is more usual to eat separately, in Chinese culture, eating dinner together is more typical and seen as a way to strengthen family ties and keep close relationships between family members (Ma, 2015). In this context, food represents the continuity of Chinese culture in the daily lives of the Meilin family.

In line with Chinese eating habits, Meilin is consistently portrayed as dining with her family. She is also seen using chopsticks which is the use of chopsticks is central to Chinese dining habits. Chopsticks are not only a set of utensils but also a symbol of culture (Wang, 2015). The daily use of chopsticks by Meilin during meals represents another example of her attempt to maintain Chinese traditions, even in practically small ways. This is a concrete illustration of how Meilin constantly respects Chinese traditions as an essential part of her cultural identity. By eating with her family and using chopsticks, Meilin not only demonstrates respect for Chinese traditions, but also strengthens her connection to her cultural origins. Furthermore, Meilin's way of maintaining Chinese culture is by following her family's advice and conducting the red panda vanishing ritual, as portrayed in the following scene:

Mr. Gao : *Just follow my directions and breathe. Now don't move from the circle. You understand? For as long as the red moon shines, the astral realm will be open. And this circle is the door.*

*(all chanting in Cantonese)*

Meilin : *What are they saying?*

Mr. Gao : *The door will open only if we sing from our hearts. (01:06:02)*

China, well recognized for its extensive cultural heritage and ancient history, has earned the renowned reputation of being a “state of ritual courtesy” due to its profound connections with diverse cultural traditions (Feng & Du, 2015). In Chinese culture, rituals are not ordinary formalities; they are the foundation of social interactions, ethical decisions, conflict resolutions, the creation of prestige, enforcement of law, education, and expressions of respect and dignity. These rituals influence every aspect of life in China, from daily interactions to national affairs, from shaping psychology to influencing behavior (Feng & Du, 2015). In the scene where Meilin fails the ritual because she chose to keep the panda, it shows she gets involved in traditions that are vital to her family’s tradition in this situation. This scene illustrates Meilin’s attempts at understanding the importance and meaning of this tradition. Even though she grew up in a distinct Western culture, she still strives to maintain her family’s traditions as part of her identity.

Based on all of the data presented in this chapter, it can be surmised that Meilin Lee, being a third-generation Chinese immigrant, possesses certain characteristics: respect for her parents, preserving of her family’s great reputation, honor to her ancestors, and practice of traditional Chinese eating habits. In this context, Meilin’s portrayal demonstrates loyalty to Chinese cultural traditions and familial values, thereby illustrating how these aspects have shaped her identity.

### **Meilin Lee Acceptance of Her Chinese Roots**

Meilin Lee, being an individual in two different cultures, illustrates the complex relationships involved in her journey of self-identity. Meilin, who was raised in a Canadian setting influenced by Western culture, grapples with the complexities of reconciling her identity due to the influence of her traditional Chinese values inherited from her family, symbolized by the red panda. Meilin firstly confronts the inconveniences and societal obstacles that her mystical red panda change offers. Nevertheless, as the plot develops, Meilin’s perspective undergoes a progressive transformation as she starts to perceive the red panda not as a burden but as an integral part of her identity.

This analysis will explain the process in which Meilin accepted and eventually embraced her red panda as the representation of her Chinese roots in the *Turning Red* film. The writer examines Meilin Lee’s acceptance of cultural identity within the framework cultural identity by Stuart Hall. The process of cultural identity acceptance is woven into various facets of Meilin’s journey, encompassing her interactions within her social sphere and the choices she makes throughout the film. This process grows as Meilin goes from early resistance to profound acceptance, affected substantially by the complexities of her familial relationships and the support of her friends.

According to Stella Ting-Toomey (1999), a person’s identity is significantly shaped by symbolic communication with others. In the dialogue between Meilin and her mother about the heritage of red pandas, the writer interpreted it as a portrayal of generational symbolic interactions within the family. As follows:

Mom : *....Sun Yee passed this gift to her daughters, for when they came of age. And they passed it to theirs. But over time, our family chose to come to a new world. And what was a blessing became an inconvenience.*

Meilin : *Are you serious? It's a curse!*

Mom : *She meant it as a blessing.*

Meilin : *You cursed us. It's all your fault! (00:28:03)*

The significance of cultural ethnicity in shaping identity is essential, as highlighted by Chen (2014), who emphasizes its expression through shared collective knowledge, such as traditions, heritage, language, aesthetics, norms, and rituals. According to Chen’s perspective, the red panda holds significant meaning as a symbol of Chinese cultural heritage, as it was originally given as a gift by ancestors to women in the family and has been passed down through generations. Meilin, who has been placed in different Western

cultures, believed that the “*gift*” was actually a “*curse*” because it brought them difficulty and conflict and thereby reflecting the impact of different modern cultural influences on her perspectives. Meilin’s discouraged perception of the red panda as a curse exemplifies the clash between traditional Chinese cultural heritage and modern Western culture.

Hence, the illustration of the red panda within the context of Meilin’s identity can be comprehended as a symbol of generational conflict and a shift in cultural identity within a family migrating to a new environment. This dialogue exemplifies how the interpretation of cultural symbols can evolve over time and lead to a clash of identities within a family, as they grapple with the challenges posed by cultural and generational differences. At the same time, Meilin’s transformation into a red panda appears as a reflection of the importance of personal security and self-confidence. This film underscores the importance of a sense of belonging and connection, both among friends and within the familial environment, throughout phases of teenage identity doubt. As follows:

Mom : *Mei-Mei!*  
 Meilin : *Don't lok at me! Stay back!*  
 Mom : *Sweetie, it's okay. Mommy is here.*  
 Meilin : *What is happening to me? (00:26:23)*

Meilin’s transformation into a red panda in front of her mother pushes her into an unexpected and frightening position. Meilin expresses her need for personal security by asking her mother to stay away from looking at her and to maintain distance. This instance exemplifies how situations that create uncertainty may trigger an individual’s basic need for assurance and trust. Meilin’s mother provided a sense of belonging, connection, and emotional stability throughout a challenging situation by offering support and reassurance. Therefore, this moment exemplifies how fundamental necessities like security, confidence, inclusion, and connection are vital to the human condition as mentioned by Stella Ting-Toomey (1999), even in difficult situations like Meilin’s undergoing change.

Ming, Meilin’s mother, also experienced the same thing during her teenage years, specifically the ability to transform into a red panda when she experienced intense emotions. Subsequently, Ming and her mother became apart as a result of Ming’s constant stress caused by the heavy academic burden she endures at school, which has transformed her into a red panda. This is in line with Chua in her book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (2011) that stated Chinese moms exert significant pressure on their children to achieve outstanding academic performance, which leads to adverse social, emotional, and psychological consequences for the children (Xie & Li, 2019). Over the course of time, the highly respected red panda became a curse, as it has the potential to destroy the bond between a mother and a child. In addition to needing support from her familial surroundings, Meilin also received support from her Western friends who just discovered that Meilin undergoes a change into a panda at certain times. It can be seen below:

Meilin : *It's just some, you know, inconvenient genetic thingy I got from my mom. I mean.. it'll go away. Eventually. Maybe. I hate this! I'm sloppy, I'm smelly. My mom won't even look at me, and now 4\*town? When are they coming?*  
 Abby : *May 18th. They just announced it.*  
 Meilin : *The 18th? There's no way this will be gone by then. Just go. Go become women without me.*  
 Miriam : *Mei. It's gonna be okay.*  
 Meilin : *No, it's not. I'm freak. Just leave me alone. (00:32:55)*

Meilin’s statement conveys her unease and worry over the peculiar change in her body. Abby and Miriam showed an encouraging response and expressing empathy. Meilin expressed her negativity regarding her change, perceiving herself as a “*freak*” and letting her friends to continue go to concert without her. The positive response from her friends, who refuse to abandon her, reflects their efforts to meet Meilin’s basic needs. Meilin’s friends’ words include fundamental elements of human needs, including a feeling of inclusion, a sense of belonging, and the durability of social connections (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Meilin’s friends offer her with emotional reassurance and safety, which strengthens their bond and highlights the significance of these key components in establishing human relationships.

As time passed, Meilin adapted to the fact that of the red panda within her. Meilin secretly exploits her abilities to earn money at school by offering paid photography sessions with red pandas and selling

related goods, all without her mother's permission. The funds earned will be used to attend 4\*Town concerts with her friends which held within their city. By profiting on her ability to transform into a red panda for money-making opportunities and promoting goods, Meilin demonstrates an acceptance of and willingness to take advantage of her cultural identity. The findings can be connected to the notion that Meilin not only acknowledges and embraces elements of her Chinese cultural identity, but also strategically employs them for her benefit. Creativity and adaptation are frequently observed as expressions of respect for cultural heritage and identity within the Chinese cultural context. By utilizing her special capabilities, Meilin is capable of combining aspects of her cultural heritage with undertakings that support the economy. This demonstrates Meilin's creative embrace and adaptation to cultural heritage, in which she not only incorporates these elements into her life but also actively participates in them to enrich her experience.

Due to the view of red pandas in the Meilin family as an inconvenience, all the female members of the Meilin family have to take part in a ritual meant for getting rid of the red panda. In the end, Meilin had to choose to stick to the planned ritual proposed by her family. Within the ritual to relieve Meilin of the red panda, her memory of the red panda which she was once at ease flashes through her mind. Meilin chose not to lose her red panda and ran to the 4\*Town concert, where she greeted her friends.

Miriam : *What are you doing here?*

Meilin : *I couldn't do it. The panda's a part of me, and you guys are too.*

Miriam : *Mei, you threw us under the bus.*

Meilin : *I know and I'm sorry. I've been, like, obsessed with my mom's approval my whole life. I couldn't take losing it, but losing you guys feels even worse. (01:11:54)*

Meilin disclosed in her statement to her friends that she failed to continue with the ritual because the red panda had become an important part of her, and her relationship with her friends also had a very important meaning to her. She admits that sacrificing their friendship to obtain her mother's approval was a mistake. In line with Stella Ting-Toomey's (1999) statements that people often perceive more power over their identities when they are distanced from a relationship, Meilin shows greater control over her sense of self as she distances herself from her relatives, as shown by her efforts to avoid the ritual and deciding for finding out her friends at the concert to make an apology. Meilin expressed her intention of regaining closeness with her friends through what she said. Thus, this scene reflects how Meilin, in her efforts to control and internalize her identity, seeks bonds and support through close relationships with her friends.

Meilin, who seeks the bonds and support of friends over her family, therefore resonates with the difficulties faced by immigrant families, including those with Chinese roots. Meilin's friends, who raised in multicultural surroundings, created an environment in which she felt more accepted and comprehended for the process of constructing her identity. The red panda's acceptance of her by her friends becomes a symbol of support for her unique identity and willingness to support her despite cultural differences. On the other hand, her ability to express herself freely may be constrained by familial expectations and traditions, which might create obstacles for her. The red panda, as a representation of her cultural identity, is a source of acceptance and support among her friends, strengthening her sense of belonging and understanding.

In addition to that, Ming expressed her anger by turning into a red panda because she perceived Meilin's departure during the ritual as impolite. Meanwhile, the Meilin family, who follows Eastern culture, highly respects the importance of familial respect. According to Yun et al. (2019), Chinese culture places a high value on respecting elders and upholding strong family values. In order to punish Meilin, Ming appears at the concert in the form of a massive red panda.

Mom : *This isn't you!*

Meilin : *This is me! (screaming)*

Grandma : *Mei-Mei!*

Dad : *Mei! Are you hurt? (Meilin panting)*

Meilin : *It was my idea to hustle the panda. My idea to go to Tyler's party! It was all me! I like boys! I like loud music! I Like gyrating! I'm 13! Deal with it! (01:15:58)*

Meilin's statement reveals her distinct personality and interests, which do not match to her mother's cultural expectations. Stella Ting-Toomey's relevant assumption of Meilin's statements is that individuals



have a consistent perception of their identity when things occur in line with the norms and expectations of their culture. However, when things are generally unpredictable, people see their identities changing or being challenged (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Her mother was startled and unable to accept this reality, but Meilin insisted that this was her actual personality. Her mother's reaction illustrates a cultural expectation difference and Meilin's attitude exemplifies how uncertainty or change from cultural standards can potentially disrupt or change an individual's perspective and understanding of their own identity.

Mom : *Mei-Mei, please. Just come with me.*

Meilin : *I'm changing, Mom. I'm finally figuring out who I am. But.. (gasp softly) ..I'm scared it'll take me away from you.*

Mom : *Me too. I see you, Mei-mei. You try to make everyone happy, but so hard on yourself. And if I taught you that.. I'm sorry. So don't hold back, for anyone. The farther you go, the prouder I'll be. (01:25:20)*

Meilin's mother, with understanding and support, responds to her daughter's decision to keep her red panda as part of her true self. Through Meilin's mother statement, Meilin's mother not only understands, but also supports Meilin's steps to live life in accordance with her true identity. Meilin's mother statement, "*the farther you go, the prouder I'll be,*", underscored her support and appreciation for Meilin's freedom to be herself. In the final scene, Meilin encounters an important point of accepting her cultural identity. After an endless arguments and thoughts, Meilin's family eventually gave permission for her to keep the red panda, a symbolic representation of her identity that had previously been regarded as a burden. As follows:

Meilin : *Sometimes I miss how things were, but nothing stays the same forever. We've all got an inner beast. We've all got a messy, loud, weird part of ourselves hidden away. And a lot of us never let it out. (01:28:37)*

Meilin acknowledged the importance of intentional and thoughtful intercultural communication. Meilin's assertion that she is longing for the past but recognizes that nothing can last in forever exemplifies her awareness of the dynamical nature of conditions and the complex personality of each individual. In Meilin's monologue, it reflects her understanding of change and acceptance of her cultural identity. This is in line with cultural identity theory by Stuart Hall which states that cultural identity develops and changes over time (Hall, 2015). Her statements about the "*messy, loud, weird*" illustrate her recognition of the uniqueness and distinctiveness of her identity. Meilin acknowledges that change is a part of living and embraces aspects of herself that differ from current social norms or expected behavior. Therefore, this analysis illustrates the journey towards embracing Meilin's cultural identity amidst the changes and improvements it has experienced.

In this chapter, the process of accepting cultural identity in *Turning Red* film follows Meilin's journey with the red panda, initially perceived as a cultural burden from her Chinese ancestors. Meilin perceived the red panda as a curse due to its impact on her desire for independence and personal freedom. However, as time passed, Meilin's acceptance grew due to the unwavering support of her peers. A moment of acceptance occurred when Meilin's family ultimately settled with her choice to keep the red panda amidst chaotic arguments. In the end, Meilin not only learned to value the red panda but also wholeheartedly embraced her different identity, as portrayed by the cherished red panda. This exemplifies the transformative potential of acceptance, comprehension, and self-exploration in the complex journey of cultural identity acceptance.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

*Turning Red* film is a great illustration of the Chinese cultural identity acceptance through the character of Meilin Lee. *Turning Red* film navigates the complexities of Meilin's journey as a third generation Chinese immigrant, highlighting her struggles, conflicts, and eventual acceptance of her cultural roots. Meilin, as third-generation Chinese immigrant in Canada, is described as someone who preserves cultural values through her unwavering devotion to traditional Chinese eating practices, respect for her parents, preservation of the family's great reputation, and regard for her ancestors.

Meilin's initial resistance and perception of the red panda as a burden represents the difficulties she faces in reconciling her cultural roots with her longing for personal freedom. However, as the story

progresses, Meilin undergoes a transformation, accepting her Chinese identity and realizing the value of honoring her ancestral traditions. *Turning Red* film demonstrates the ever-changing nature of cultural identity by portraying the complex relationship that immigrants, in particular, must preserve while adjusting into unfamiliar surroundings. Meilin's embrace symbolizes not only an individual insight, but also an awareness of more extensive symbols such as the dynamic character of cultural identity, familial responsibilities, and intergenerational connections. Ultimately, *Turning Red* serves as a poignant exploration of the acceptance of Chinese immigrant cultural identity, emphasizing the significance of embracing one's roots while navigating the challenges of adolescence and self-discovery in a multicultural society. *Turning Red* film contributes to the larger discussion about cultural identity in modern film by offering people with an intriguing story that resonates with universal themes.

This study validates Stuart Hall's idea that cultural identity is always changing according to cultural situations and interactions. Meilin's journey shows that identity is fluid and growing. Meilin's identity changes as she struggles with acceptance, representing the complex relationship between tradition and adaptation. In conclusion, *Turning Red* provides an insightful perspective on the cultural identity acceptance and a nuanced representation of how people like Meilin establish cultural identities in today's different and ever-changing world.

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