CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Culture

According to Oatey (2012), culture is a difficult term to define because the term has multiple meanings. There are three prominent perspectives about culture that consider its characteristics. Firstly, Kroeber & Kluckhohn (1952) states that culture consists of both explicit and implicit behavioral patterns that are learned and communicated through symbols. These patterns reflect the accomplishments and distinctive achievements of human groups, shaping their social identity. The core of culture is made up of traditional ideas, which often form the foundation of societal norms, but it is the values attached to these ideas that define a culture's character. These values influence everything from daily practices to social institutions, guiding individuals' actions, beliefs, and interactions within their community.

Matsumoto (1996) states that culture is a set of beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors shared by a group of people and communicated across generations, to ensure their continued existence. While these elements are common to a group, these elements may be experienced and expressed uniquely by each individual member. Furthermore, culture is transmitted from one generation to the next, maintaining a degree of stability while also possessing the potential to evolve over time. Additionally, these shared elements influence how individuals within the group behave and interpret the actions and behaviors of others (Oatey, 2008).

Hofstede (2001) defined culture as the collective programming of the mind which differentiates the members of one group of people from another. Therefore, people inherently carry multiple layers of mental programming within themselves that correlate to different levels of culture. For example: (a) a national level, according to one's country, or countries for those who have migrated during their lifetime; (b) a geographical and/or ethnic and/or religious and/or linguistic affinity, as most nations are made up of culturally diverse areas, ethnicities, religious and/or language groups; (c) a generational level that divides grandparents, parents, and children; (d) a role type, such as parent, son/daughter, teacher, or student; and (e) a

social class level is related with educational options and a person's occupation or profession.

In the book "*Cross-cultural psychology: Research and applications,*" Berry, Poortinga, Segall, and Dasen (2002) categorize cultural discussions into six key areas. Culture can be described by its associated activities and behaviors (descriptive uses), or by its heritage and traditions (historical definitions). Furthermore, culture is defined by the rules and norms that govern a group (normative uses), and by psychological aspects such as learning and problem-solving. It also encompasses societal or organizational elements (structural definitions), and its origins (genetic descriptions). This comprehensive view underscores that culture is a complex construct, encompassing a wide array of human experience and social organization.

Beyond these perspectives, it is important to note that culture evolves continuously through global influences, technological advancements, and cross-cultural interactions. Therefore, culture is a fluid and adaptable construct. Ultimately, understanding culture requires an appreciation of its complexity and the diverse ways it manifests in human behavior and societal structures.

2.2 Chinese Culture

Chinese civilization, one of the oldest known cultures in the world, has a rich history that extends over thousands of years (Hearst, 2005). The majority of the population, approximately 92%, belongs to the Han ethnic group, but there are also 55 other ethnic minority groups, primarily live in the western regions and along the southern borders (Asif et al., 2019). Mandarin Chinese is the official language, although Cantonese is commonly spoken in the southern areas and in Hong Kong.

Chinese culture, with its rich and deep-rooted history, is shaped by a profound respect for tradition, social harmony, and family values. This section delves into the core beliefs and practices that influence both social structures and individual behavior. Understanding these traditions provides insight into the cultural foundations that still play a significant role in modern Chinese society. Additionally, these themes are particularly relevant to this study, which examines

the representation of Chinese culture in *Turning Red* film. The following points highlight some of the most influential cultural components in Chinese history.

2.2.1 Chinese Traditional Beliefs and Practices

Chinese culture is deeply rooted in traditional beliefs shaped by its rich history. This section explores key traditional beliefs essential to understanding the cultural context. The first prominent belief is Confucianism, which suggests that individuals are inherently benevolent and capable of moral development (Chen, 1991). Confucianism believes that cultivating virtues such as politeness, righteousness, and wisdom is essential to contributing to a harmonious society. According to Bedford and Hwang (2003) Confucian beliefs emphasize that a person's life is an inheritance from their ancestors, just as the lives of their children are an extension of their own. The Confucian also focuses on education, regardless of social class, reflecting the belief in individual potential (Li, 2009). Additionally, Hung (2023) concludes that Confucians emphasize moral force through rites, behaviors, and conduct to uphold family values and social harmony.

One of the most significant beliefs and practices in Chinese culture is ancestor worship. Ancestor worship is the practice of honoring deceased family members who are believed to remain spiritually present and capable of influencing the lives of the living (Coe & Begley, 2016). Scholars also define it based on belief systems; for instance, C. N. Ubah (1982) describes it as the belief in the existence and power of ancestral spirits. Ancestor worship often associated with *"pai pai"* which literally means "to bow" or "to pray" in Chinese. *Pai pai* is the practice of honoring deceased family members, who are viewed as continuing to be part of the family and whose spirits are believed to have the ability to influence the lives of the living (Coe & Begley, 2016). *Pai pai* involves offering food, burning three incense sticks, and kneeling and kowtow three times. After each time, family members would pour more wine to our ancestors. Then they would go outside, burn paper money, and pour wine around the burning paper money. The rituals were typically held in an ancestral hall in the large family house.

The other prominent beliefs is the practice of collectivism and cleanliness, which holds significant importance in traditional Chinese culture. Cleaning sacred spaces is also viewed as a way to purify the area from negative energy *(qi)* and restore balance. As Wong (2018) notes, spatial cleanliness is believed to influence spiritual well-being and emotional clarity. *Feng shui* is the art of arranging physical spaces in a way that harmonizes with natural forces to avoid misfortune and enhance good luck (Kryžanowski, 2021). This belief extends beyond just individual spaces to the arrangement of cities and landscapes, demonstrating a profound respect for the balance between humans and their environment. It highlights the Chinese emphasis on maintaining harmony with nature to achieve a balanced and prosperous life.

Other than that, Chinese culture is often described as collectivistic, as noted by scholars such as Hoftsede (1980, as cited in Techo, 2017) and Bond and Hwang (1986). Chinese collectivism often values *guanxi*, which is a Chinese term referring to relational connections, as an important way to accomplish goals (Hwang, 1987). This cultural orientation is based on the belief that individuals within the same group are connected, and their well-being relies on their shared responsibility. When each person follows group norms and prioritizes the group's interests, it is believed that the whole group will remain harmonious and successful. This sense of valuing collectivism manifests in close-knit relationships and an emphasis on togetherness, where loyalty and mutual support within the in-group are seen as essential.

Chinese people also believe in the meaning of symbols that can be found in images, language, artwork, architecture, and everyday objects. They serve as a means of conveying the values, beliefs, and aspirations of a specific cultural group (Hearst, 2005). In Chinese culture, symbolism plays a significant role, associated with concepts such as luck, prosperity, longevity, happiness, and wealth being particularly prominent (Hann, 2013). Symbols representing these virtues are often seen in everyday life and appear during holidays and festivals. Below is an exploration of symbols that reflect cultural ideals and influence practices and rituals within Chinese society.

1. Animals

   The red panda symbolizes peace, harmony, as well as valor and bravery. It has also become a national symbol of China, representing national pride and identity, and is frequently used in diplomacy to signify goodwill and peaceful relations (Christensen, 2024). Red panda also symbolizes the spirit of calmness. (Asif et al., 2019). Lions in pairs are believed to protect buildings and drive away negative spirits (Young & Min-Chia, 2009), meanwhile fish are sign of ambition and perseverance.

2. Colors

   Red symbolizes tradition, success, and good fortune, transformation, and also chaos. Red also has relation to the color of blood, associated with both life and death (Bethe et al., 1991). while white is associated with mourning and death. Yellow represents the earth, power, and abundance, while orange signifies vitality, enthusiasm, and transformation.

3. Food

   Eggs are a symbol of fertility and the renewal of life, served as a blessing for a long, prosperous life. Chinese dumplings symbolize wealth and prosperity, and apples symbolize peace, harmony (Lin, 2024)

4. Flowers and Plants

   The lotus (héhuā) represents purity and spiritual awakening, Peony symbolizes beauty and prosperity, chrysanthemums symbolize longevity, and bamboo symbolizes strength and resilience.

The use of symbolism in *Turning Red* reflects many traditional elements of Chinese culture, highlighting the values, beliefs, and aspirations that shape the characters' lives. Throughout the film, various possession, such as animals, furniture, food, and colors, are woven into the story, reinforcing themes of family, identity, and cultural heritage. These symbols not only enrich the story but also provide insight into the characters' cultural backgrounds. By integrating these symbols, *Turning Red* not only explores the struggles of adolescence but also

deepens the cultural tone of the narrative, offering a deep interpretation of Chinese traditional values within the context of self-discovery and generational conflict.

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2.2.2 Chinese Family Values

Filial piety, known in Chinese language as *xiào* (孝), has been a prominent subject of academic study for many years. Rudy (2020) observes that these studies frequently explore religious, sociological, and psychological perspectives. Rooted in traditional Chinese family values, filial piety forms the core of Confucian ethics (Taylor & Arbuckle, 1995). It defines moral standards for both material and emotional aspects of the parent-child relationship, emphasizing profound respect for parents and ancestors (Bedford & Yeh, 2019). Anchored in Confucian philosophy, filial piety governs familial connection while shaping societal harmony and ethical behavior. Hung (2023) asserts that this principle highlights responsibilities such as obedience, care, respect for the elders' wisdom, and prioritizing collective well-being over individual desires, that is also called collectivism.

Generational hierarchies are integral to filial piety, reinforcing the honor for elders and their authority. As noted by Yerin Pak (2013), family is viewed as the foundational unit of society, where the elder generation holds a revered status due to their life experience and wisdom. Consequently, the younger generation, especially children, is expected to show respect and obedience to their elders, a principle that extends to decision-making, caregiving, and moral guidance. This hierarchical structure promotes social order and continuity, ensuring that traditional values are passed down through generations. Filial piety even extends beyond care

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for living family members to respect and rituals for those who have passed away (Angle, 2010).

However, the expectation of unquestioning respect for elders can create tension in modern times, particularly when younger generations challenge traditional practices or seek independence. These generational conflicts are often framed as challenges between individual autonomy and collective responsibility, a dynamic that reflects broader societal changes (Teon, 2016). In contemporary settings, traditional expectations of absolute obedience and lifelong caregiving are increasingly balanced with more flexible interpretations that accommodate changing social structures, such as urbanization, career mobility, and shifting family dynamics (Hu & Scott, 2014). As Zhang and Wei (2021) note, modern expressions of filial piety may emphasize emotional support and mutual respect over rigid hierarchical obedience. Additionally, government policies, such as China's Elderly Rights Law, reflect ongoing efforts to uphold filial responsibilities while adapting to the realities of contemporary life. This evolution highlights how filial piety remains a cornerstone of Chinese culture, yet it continues to transform as societal values and economic conditions change.

In *Turning Red*, these themes of filial piety, family expectations, and generational conflict are emotionally illustrated through Mei's relationship with her family. It highlights the tension between traditional expectations and the desire for personal identity. By exploring these dynamics, the film not only sheds light on the enduring significance of filial piety in Chinese culture but also invites audiences to reflect on the balance between collective responsibility and individual aspirations in a rapidly changing world.

These shifting expressions of filial piety and family values reflect how Chinese cultural identity is continuously transformed across time, generations, and contexts. As shown in *Turning Red*, cultural values are not static, but rather constructed, adapted, and represented through narrative, visual, and symbolic elements. This understanding forms the foundation for the next chapter, which will analyze how *Turning Red* represents Chinese beliefs and values through its film

elements, offering a deeper insight into the cultural meanings embedded within the movie.

2.3 Stuart Hall's Representation Theory

Stuart Hall identifies three theories of representation, which are the reflective approach, the intentional approach, and the constructionist approach. The reflective approach operates like a mirror, reflecting the original meaning of realities, objects, people, or ideas, with meaning depending on these elements (Wardah & Kusuma, 2022). The intentional approach, on the other hand, relies on language to convey meaning from a specific point of view. Here, meaning is shaped by the writer, speaker, or communicator to express their perspective. Lastly, the constructionist approach suggests that meaning is created through language, encompassing elements such as images, light, and sound, which are considered forms of expression using material objects.

The concept of representation illustrates the relationship between media texts and actual reality (Anderson, 2006: 288). It involves producing meaning from conceptual ideas in the mind through language, enabled by a representation system. However, interpretation is influenced by the background knowledge and perceptions of a social group. Shared experiences within a social group are essential for a common understanding. This process highlights how representation bridges the gap between conceptual ideas and their expression in various media forms. Hutauruk and Saragih (2023) also reinforces that representation is important because culture is always formed through meaning and language.

Stuart Hall's constructionist approach to representation (1997) is based on the idea that language, signs, and images are how people in a society make and share meaning. According to Hall, representation is not solely a reflection of reality; it is also a process of actively constructing it. He highlights how filmmakers encode cultural representations with particular meanings, and audiences decode them. Hall's representation theory and his encoding and decoding model, which describes the creation and interpretation of media signals, are closely related. Although

filmmakers encode messages with specific meanings, audiences may decode them differently based on their cultural and personal experience.

Films, as visual and auditory texts, use a combination of signs, such as images, gestures, dialogue, lighting, color, music, and camera movement to construct cultural narratives. In this context, films do not simply show culture, but they build meaning about culture through selective storytelling and symbolic representation. The constructionist approach views film as a language system, where every cinematic element can function like a word or symbol that contributes to how culture is interpreted. This makes it a fitting lens for analyzing *Turning Red*, as the film carefully weaves traditional Chinese beliefs, values, and rituals into its plot and mise-en-scène to communicate deeper cultural messages to a diverse audience.

In analyzing the representation of Chinese culture in *Turning Red*, the constructionist approach provides the most effective framework. Rather than simply reflecting an objective reality or solely conveying the filmmaker's intent, *Turning Red* actively constructs cultural meaning through its use of film elements such as visuals, symbolism, and character interactions. This approach acknowledges that meaning is not fixed but is shaped through language, imagery, and narrative.

By employing Stuart Hall's constructionist approach to representation, this study explores how *Turning Red* presents a dynamic portrayal of Chinese family beliefs and values. The film constructs a particular version of Chinese culture through its visuals, family dynamics, and symbolism, such as the red panda, which can be interpreted in various ways depending on cultural context. This perspective also allows for a critical discussion on how media contributes to shaping audience perceptions of Chinese culture, emphasizing the dynamic and evolving nature of representation in film.

2.4 Elements of Film

A film is the product of two essential sets of components: technical elements such as cinematography, lighting, sound, and editing, and artistic elements that

transform the production from mere techniques into a work of art (Bobker & Lee, 1969). Additionally, Golden (2015) explains that cinematic techniques include shot composition, camera angles, and movements, as well as the integration of sound and editing. Theatrical elements, on the other hand, involve costumes, set design, props, and acting choices. Therefore, the study of film elements centers on how these cinematic and theatrical components work together to construct meaning within a movie. These aspects, both technical and narrative, contribute to the film's storytelling and its portrayal of culture, themes, and character dynamics. The following section explores these film elements, highlighting how they create unity and depth within *Turning Red*.

2.4.1 Cinematography

According to Heiderich (2012), cinematography is an art that involves the arrangement of visual elements to tell a story through film. It refers to the technical aspects of filmmaking related to the camera, such as camera movements, lighting, and lens choices. While it is possible to record images by simply positioning a camera, true cinematic artistry is demonstrated in the deliberate control of what the audience can see or not see, and how those images are framed and presented. This skillful orchestration of visual components is fundamental to shaping the viewer's perception of the narrative (Grubba, 2020). However, in theoretical contexts, the term is sometimes used more broadly to encompass the overall elements of film form. Lotman (2016) argues that filmmakers tend to focus on its practical applications, such as camera movements and lighting, while theoretical literature may expand the term to include a wider range of film-related concepts. This distinction highlights the evolving nature of cinematography as both a technical and artistic component of filmmaking.

In cinematography, various shot types are used to convey different emotions and perspectives (Heiderich, 2012). For instance, high angle and low angle shot highlight the power imbalance. Extreme long shot emphasizes the insignificance of a character within a huge environment. The long shot creates emotional distance, where viewers observe events from a distance, detached from the emotional details.

A medium shot brings the audience closer to the characters that are interacting, facilitating a personal connection. Other than that, the close up shot intensifies this intimacy by focusing on a character's expressions, drawing attention to their emotions. The extreme close up further amplifies emotional intensity, highlighting small, significant emotional cues. Finally, the Bird's eye shot detaches the viewer from the characters entirely, showcasing the beauty of landscapes or cityscapes, and focusing on shapes and patterns. Together, these shots provide a wide range of perspectives, each contributing to the emotional and narrative of a scene.

2.4.2 Mise-en-scène

Mise-en-scene refers to the arrangement of everything that appears on the screen, such as people, setting and property, costumes, backgrounds, and lighting (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004). The term originates from French, meaning "placing on stage." It was initially applied to European theatre but has been adapted across various performing arts, including virtual reality, film, and animation (Wikayanto et al., 2023).

In film, mise-en-scene plays a crucial role in guiding the viewer's attention, enhancing the narrative, and establishing the tone. It encompasses both the physical elements, such as set design, lighting, and costumes—and intangible factors, like the positioning of actors and their movements within the frame. These elements combine to create visual harmony, build atmosphere, and evoke specific emotional responses (Setyawan et al., 2020). For example, lighting can suggest the time of day, reveal the psychological state of characters, or highlight key aspects of a scene. Costumes and props not only contribute to authenticity but also carry symbolic meanings that enrich the narrative.

In animated films specifically, the visual style of the background and environment is essential for creating an atmosphere that integrates seamlessly with the characters and their actions, reinforcing the story's themes and emotional impact (Wikayanto et al., 2023). By controlling these elements, filmmakers create an immersive experience that draws the audience into the story and effectively communicate the intended purpose.

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Color is also a crucial element of mise-en-scene, playing a significant role in shaping the emotional and visual tone of a film. It is one of the most important components in any composition, including film, photography, painting, and 3D rendering. Colors are used to evoke specific moods, symbolize ideas, and emphasize narrative theme. Filmmakers should carefully choose colors to reinforce a character's personality or highlight pivotal moments in the story. For example, vibrant and saturated colors can reflect the enthusiasm of youth, while muted or darker tones might suggest tension or melancholy (Swarnakar, 2023). Moreover, consistent color palettes help establish a cohesive visual style, unifying the film thematically. Therefore, by using color strategically, filmmakers can also enhance the audience's connection to the story and deepen their understanding of its underlying themes.

2.4.3 Theme

Geraldine Brooks, in her 2008 work, argues that the theme of a story is expressed through its subject matter. She asserts that the central message or idea of the narrative is deeply connected to the events, characters, and settings within the story. This idea is reinforced by Parnuningsih (2019) who explains that theme is a fundamental element in storytelling, serving as the foundation upon which the narrative is built. Theme acts as the central focus, driving the plot and shaping character actions and the progression of events. By analyzing the connection and evolution of these elements, audiences can reveal the deeper themes the author intends to convey. Every story, whether in a novel or a film, revolves around a specific theme, providing coherence and depth. Therefore, theme serves as conduit for effectively delivering the story's intended purpose, because a well-defined theme helps audiences perceive the essence of the narrative and its message.

According to Parnuningsih (2019), there are five common types of themes, such as themes of God, physical themes, social themes, organic themes, and egoist themes. Themes of God are religious themes, they refer to themes related to religion, faith, spirituality, divinity, or the relationship between humanity and the divine. Physical themes refer to themes related to the body, physicality, mortality,

or the material world, and the other terms could be "themes of mortality," or "materialistic themes." Social themes refer to themes that explore societal issues, relationships between individuals and society, social structures, and cultural norms. Organic themes are known as natural themes, which refer to themes related to nature, the environment, growth, or natural processes. And also, egoist themes are known as individualism themes. They refer to themes related to selfishness, self-interest, individualism, or the conflict between individual desires and societal expectations.

2.4.4 Character

Character is a trait, style, or nature of an individual shaped by their background and surrounding environment (Setyawan et al., 2020). In the context of film, characters are figures that take part in the plot of the film, meanwhile a main character is a figure who determines the motion of the scene. Edward Jones (1968) argues that characters in fiction serve various roles in shaping the story because each character is unique. This suggests that characters can influence and drive the plot in diverse ways, allowing for complexities where no one is entirely right or completely wrong. Moreover, Zarawaki (2022) states that character creation is crucial in conveying the author's intended message and purpose, ensuring that it is understood by the audience.

Characters in films have moral qualities shown through their actions and dialogue, which audiences use to interpret the values of the story (Abrams, 2008, as cited in Parnuningsih, 2019). This means that characters are designed to act or speak in ways that reflect the author's intentions and drive the narrative's themes forward. Moreover, characters in fiction are often created to reflect strong moral values, aiming to teach audiences important lessons. Each character is designed with unique qualities and follows their own moral compass, which differentiates them from one another (Zarawaki et al., 2022). This variety in character traits contributes to the depth of the plot and provides insight into different perspectives, helping the audience better understand the lessons and themes of the story.

2.4.5 Plot

In literature and storytelling, narrative structure is often equal with plot. According to Aprilialdo (2022), a plot is a sequence of events and actions that drive a narrative, forming the central structure that illustrates the progress of events and their impact on the characters and the overall story. Hellerman (2024) explains that plot provides a coherent and logical sequence that engages the audience, providing the story with a sense of direction and purpose. While narrative structure and plot are often used interchangeably, some scholars argue that narrative structure refers to the overall organization of a story, while plot emphasizes the causal sequence of events. Additionally, Sholihah (2021) mentions that Aristotle, a famous Greek philosopher and scientist, identified the fundamental structure of a plot as consisting a beginning, middle, and end. This marked the introduction of the three-act structure in literature, theatre, television, poetry, and all other narrative-driven mediums.

The beginning of a plot introduces the characters and their circumstances, setting up the conflict or situation that demands resolution. The middle, often the most dynamic section, unfolds the rising action and deepens the narrative. Here is where characters face obstacles, make critical decisions, and experience growth or setbacks that build tension. Conflict is introduced in a story to add depth and maintain audience engagement; it makes the struggles faced by the characters in achieving their goals more compelling. Conflicts occur not only because of clashes or problems between characters but they can also be caused by themselves or the environment (Zarawaki (2022). According to Chatman, as cited in Reyes (2019), narratives are built around causal chains, where characters move toward goals or are confronted with obstacles. Conflict arises when these characters encounter events that challenge their plans.

Finally, the end of the plot brings the narrative to a resolution. The end is where conflicts are addressed and the story concludes with a sense of closure or a deliberate open-ended question. This plot structure ensures coherence and emotional engagement that guides audiences through a captivating journey. Therefore, a well-written plot is significant in helping audience to find the purpose of the story.

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