

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

4.1 Conclusion

Film, as a cultural medium, serves not only to entertain but also to communicate values, beliefs, and identities through character behavior, rituals, and symbolism. It reflects deeper meanings of culture by constructing cultural values into visual and emotional narratives that resonate with audiences. *Turning Red* is one such example, where film elements are carefully used to convey the richness and complexity of Chinese traditions and identity.

Turning Red presents a rich portrayal of Chinese culture, particularly highlighting its rich tapestry of symbolism and ritual. From the ancestral temple where Mei and her family regularly serve, to the ceremonial act of sealing the red panda spirit, the film showcases how traditional beliefs and spiritual practices are seamlessly woven into everyday life. The filmmaker intends to show that the rituals are more than just traditions; they are important gestures that reflect continuity across generations. Central to these practices is the value of *xiao* or filial piety, a virtue that emphasizes loyalty, obedience, and care toward one's parents and ancestors. Mei's commitment to fulfilling temple duties, despite her personal desires, demonstrates how deeply rooted these cultural expectations are in shaping a child's sense of responsibility and identity.

At the heart of the film is the red panda, a symbol that operates on multiple levels. It represents suppressed emotions, intergenerational expectations, and the challenges of self-discovery during adolescence. Rather than a curse or fantasy device, the red panda becomes a metaphor for transformation. It captures the tension between personal expression and inherited duty, especially for girls raised in culturally conservative settings. Ming's debate with her own mother as well as her eventual acceptance of Mei's decision to embrace her panda, demonstrate that even hard customs allow for reinterpretation. In this context, respect for elders and heritage does not always equate to blind obedience. It can also mean honoring the past by thoughtfully adapting it to the present. This representation avoids

stereotyping Chinese parenting as oppressive or authoritative. Instead, it portrays Chinese parenting as being rooted in love and shaped by sacrifice.

One of the most prominent and foundational Chinese beliefs portrayed in the film is ancestor reverence. For instance, the use of three burning incense sticks symbolizes respect for the interconnectedness of sky, earth, and human life, central to Chinese cosmology. Acts like lighting candles and sweeping the altar space are more than just rituals; they reflect spiritual devotion, emotional readiness, and a deep sense of connection across generations. These details reinforce the idea that spiritual tradition is not just practiced but felt, relational rather than mechanical.

The film also utilizes symbolic possessions to deepen its cultural expression. Visual details, such as red temple architecture, lanterns, guardian panda statues, koi ponds, lotus flowers, and peonies, each carry specific meanings. These symbols communicate values of protection, spiritual strength, beauty, resilience, and transformation. In this way, the mise-en-scène becomes a cultural text, layered with messages that connect viewers to Chinese heritage.

The representation of symbolic meals in *Turning Red* similarly reflects Chinese beliefs. While some of the food shown may not be strictly traditional, each dish carries meaning rooted in Chinese cultural symbolism. For example, dumplings for wealth, pork belly for unity, and sunny-side-up eggs for new beginnings. Food becomes a form of emotional communication, a way to express love, tradition, and shared memory across generations.

Beyond belief systems, the film vividly represents key Chinese family values, including generational hierarchy, the preservation of family honor, collectivism, and emotional restraint or self-restraint. Authority flows from elders to youth, as seen in the dynamic between Mei's grandmother and mother. Children are expected to uphold the family's dignity, through obedience, academic achievement, and socially acceptable behavior. Furthermore, family honor becomes both motivation and burden. In this context, Ming and Mei's personal desires are often sacrificed for the sake of maintaining their family's image. This illustrates how the value of filial piety can evolve into pressure. This is further complicated by the collectivist

nature of her community, where togetherness is shown not only in rituals and meals but also in the expectation that individual identity must align with group harmony.

The film's exploration of emotional restraint adds another layer of cultural representation. The red panda, which is originally a symbol of maternal love and protection, is now seen as a disruptive force that should be sealed away. This reflects a cultural emphasis on self-restraint, drawn from Confucian ideals, where public composure is more valued than emotional openness. Mei's internal struggle between expressing joy, anger, sadness, and hiding them, mirrors a broader generational shift occurring within diasporic and modern Chinese communities.

Essentially, *Turning Red* counters the stereotypical media portrayals of Chinese identity often seen in Western films, where Chinese communities are frequently reduced to tropes of excessive wealth, secretive traditions, or social exclusivity. Instead, the film represents a warm, culturally rich family dynamic, rooted in values of respect, rituals, and care. It highlights how love in Chinese families is often expressed through actions rather than verbal affirmations, inviting audiences to appreciate the beauty of subtle affection and deep-rooted loyalty. These representations challenge the assumption that Chinese families are emotionally distant or rigid, revealing instead a culture where emotional expression often takes the form of quiet service and sacrifice.

Ultimately, the film offers a layered portrayal of why Chinese people are often seen as high achievers. This perception stems not merely from ambition, but from being raised to uphold family honor and to prioritize the collective well-being over individual desires. Academic and personal success is regarded as a reflection of family reputation, reinforcing the Confucian ideal of filial piety. Through the red panda and the emotional journey of Mei and Ming, *Turning Red* reflects the evolving yet enduring aspects of cultural identity, which is honoring the heritage, while also making room for transformation and self-expression. It also moves beyond surface-level stereotypes, portraying Chinese people not as rigid or one-dimensional, but as evolving, emotionally rich individuals navigating tradition in a modern world. The film invites audiences to reflect not only on cultural difference,

but on the shared human journey of finding balance between heritage and individuality.

4.2 Suggestion

This study can be further developed in future research by exploring other aspects of *Turning Red* that were beyond the scope of this analysis. Due to time and methodological limitations, this research primarily focused on the representation of Chinese cultural values through family dynamics and symbolism. However, *Turning Red* also presents rich opportunities for comparative studies, such as analyzing how different films represent Chinese identity across diasporic contexts, or how East Asian cultures are portrayed in Western animation more broadly. Additionally, future studies could examine the film's narrative techniques or audience reception, particularly among Asian viewers. Scholars might also analyze similar themes in other Pixar or Disney films to trace patterns of cultural representation across studio productions. These alternative perspectives could contribute to a deeper understanding of how culture is constructed, mediated, and communicated through film.