

NAVIGATING THE DUALITY: THE CULTURAL DYNAMICS OF FATHERHOOD IN TURNING RED

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ABSTRACT - Turning Red offers a complex portrait of a Chinese-Canadian family enduring generational and cultural conflicts. Through textual analysis and consideration of cultural contexts, this research aims to illuminate the complexities of fatherhood in a multicultural household. The father, Jin, has a big impact on the family dynamic even though the mother-daughter's bond is the main focus of the movie. This study examines the cultural dynamics of Jin's parenthood by examining the tension he faces in balancing his support for his daughter's emotional needs with the expectations of conventional Chinese masculinity. By examining Jin's interactions with family, the research explores how his parenting style reflects cultural norms surrounding fatherhood. By applying the type of parenting and its relationship with Asian parenting style, this research tries to examine whether his approach act as a counterpoint to mother's stricter methods. This research also examines whether this parenting style represent a conscious effort to break the cycle of authoritarian parenting often seen in Chinese families. Furthermore, the research considers how Jin's portrayal reflects the reality of father involvement within Asian cultures. This research employs textual analysis as the primary method where the writer conducted of specific scenes in Turning Red focusing on Jin's interactions with Mei and Ming. Dialogue, body language, and visual cues will be analyzed to understand his role within the family dynamic. This research uses concepts of cultural expectations of fatherhood, multicultural families and shifting family dynamics. The finding shows that Jin's behavior aligns or subverts traditional notion. Jin navigates the complexities of raising a child in a bicultural household and Jin's parenting style interacts with Ming's approach, creating a unique dynamic within the family. These findings contribute to a broader understanding of how cultural norms and personal choices shape parenting styles, particularly within the context of animated films.

Keywords: Parenting, culture, multicultural families

INTRODUCTION

Turning Red (2022) is a life story of teenager and her conflict with family that is delivered onto the screen with a familiar story about adolescent transition. Although Mei Lee's unexpected power to turn into a massive red panda serves as the main source of tension in the movie, a closer look reveals a little but important shift in the dynamics of the Lee family. Though Jin Lee, Mei's father, is sometimes overshadowed by her funny and overly protective mother Ming, there is another character who is full of analytical possibilities. Asian dads have been portrayed negatively in Western media for many years, oftentimes as emotionless, stoic men who put duty and obedience above everything else. Turning Red and other movies provide a great chance to dispel these myths and examine the difficulties of Asian fatherhood.

This study explores the complex situation created by Jin's connection with Mei, his place in the family, and his cultural background. We contend that Jin's portrayal does more than only challenge the image of the Asian father. Rather, he stands for a new kind of fatherhood: one who manages the challenges of cultural norms and acculturation while providing his daughter with a nurturing atmosphere.

To unpack the complexities of Jin's fatherhood, writer utilizes acculturation theory (Berry, 1997) as a guiding framework. This theory posits that individuals navigating cultural environments different from their own experience a process of acculturation. This process involves adaptation, integration, and sometimes conflict as individuals attempt to reconcile their heritage with their new cultural surroundings. In the context of Turning Red, acculturation theory allows writer to analyze how Jin, likely a first-generation immigrant, might be balancing his upbringing and cultural values with the realities of raising a daughter in a Westernized environment like Canada. It paves the way for exploring how this process of acculturation might influence Jin's interactions with Ming, who might hold onto more traditional cultural values, and Mei, a child growing up in a world vastly different from her parents' experiences.

This research employs a multifaceted approach to understand Jin's fatherhood. Firstly, the writer conducts a close analysis of the film, focusing on scenes that showcase Jin's interactions with Ming and Mei. These scenes will provide valuable insights into his parenting style, communication patterns, and emotional expression. Secondly, writer explores the cultural context that informs Jin's character. This includes research on traditional Asian family structures, expectations of fatherhood, and the emphasis on respect for elders. Understanding this cultural context allows us to evaluate how Jin might be navigating these expectations within a modern household. Finally, writer considers Jin's own personality and experiences. Does he exhibit any traits that deviate from the stereotypical Asian father figure? How might his own relationship with his father have shaped his parenting style? Looking at Jin as an individual allows us to move beyond stereotypes and appreciate the nuanced portrayal of a father trying to connect with his daughter.

This research aims to go beyond simply identifying how Jin subverts the stereotype of the Asian father. We propose that Jin's characterization paves the way for a more nuanced portrayal of Asian fathers in contemporary media. By analyzing his role within the family, his acculturation process, and his individual personality, we hope to redefine the image of the

Asian father in popular culture, highlighting the warmth, humor, and support that these fathers can offer their children. Through this exploration, writer contributes to ongoing conversations surrounding Asian representation in film and the ever-evolving landscape of fatherhood. This study seeks to move beyond the red panda transformation at the film's core and delve deeper into the subtle yet significant transformation in the portrayal of Asian fatherhood that *Turning Red* offers

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are some discussion about representation of Asian fathers in media. First which entitled "Conflicted Traditions, Invisible Lives: The Portrayal of Asian American Fathers on Television" (Kim, 2008): This study examines the portrayal of Asian American fathers on television, highlighting the recurring stereotype of the distant, authoritarian figure. While this previous research provides a starting point to understand the limitations of existing portrayals, this recent research tries to provide some insights how Jin might deviate from this stereotype. Second research is "Beyond the Stereotype: Redefining Asian Fatherhood in Children's Literature" (Han, 2010). This research explores the portrayal of Asian fathers in children's literature, showcasing a move towards more nuanced portrayals that challenge stereotypes. It provides a valuable perspective on how media is evolving in its depiction of Asian fathers.

The discussion which explores how acculturation influences relationships between Asian American parents and their adolescent children is brought by Sun and Wang (2005) through their research entitled *Acculturation and Parent-Child Relationships of Asian American Adolescents*. It provides insights into the potential tensions Jin might face as he negotiates his cultural background with raising Mei in a different cultural environment. Another research that can be used to describe this dynamic can be seen from "Mother-Tongue Maintenance and Intergenerational Solidarity: The Role of Acculturation among Korean Immigrant Families" (Cho & Kibria, 2007): This research shows the complexities of family dynamics within Asian immigrant families. It highlights the potential for differences in acculturation levels between parents, which might play out in the dynamic between Jin and Ming.

Acculturation Theory, developed by John W. Berry (1997), provides a framework for understanding how individuals and groups adapt to new cultural environments. It goes beyond simply assimilation, acknowledging the complex interplay between maintaining one's heritage culture and integrating into a new one. At the heart of Acculturation Theory lies the concept of psychological adaptation, which refers to the behavioral and psychological shifts individuals experience as they navigate cultural contact. This adaptation can manifest in various ways:

- Cultural Maintenance: The desire to hold onto aspects of one's original culture, such as language, traditions, and values.
- Cultural Change: The adoption of new cultural practices, beliefs, and behaviors from the dominant culture.
- Acculturative Stress: The psychological strain and challenges that can arise during the process of acculturation.

Berry proposes four primary strategies individuals might adopt when navigating cultural contact. Those are integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization. By analyzing Jin's character through the lens of acculturation theory, writer explores the several aspects as follows:

- **Jin's Acculturation Strategy:** Does he appear to be integrating, assimilating, separating, or experiencing marginalization? Look for evidence in the film that suggests his level of comfort with both his heritage culture and Canadian culture.
- **Cultural Maintenance:** How does Jin maintain his cultural identity within the Lee family? Does he speak his native language, celebrate traditional holidays, or hold onto specific values?
- **Cultural Change:** Has Jin adopted aspects of Canadian culture? Does his parenting style reflect any influences from his new environment?
- **Acculturative Stress:** Does the film hint at any potential challenges Jin might be facing due to his cultural background?

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a multi-pronged approach to analyze Jin Lee's fatherhood in *Turning Red* and explore its connection to his cultural background and acculturation process. First step was collecting the data. The primary source of data will be the film itself, *Turning Red* (2022). The writer conducted a close reading of the film, focusing on scenes that showcase Jin's interactions with Mei and Ming. Pay close attention to dialogue, nonverbal cues, and family dynamics portrayed in these scenes. After collecting the data, the writer analyzed the content of the film, specifically focusing on scenes involving Jin. This includes examining his dialogue, interactions with other characters, and any visual cues that provide clues about his personality and parenting style. Thematic Analysis was conducted by identifying recurring themes related to Jin's fatherhood, such as communication styles, expression of emotions, and cultural practices. Next step was applying Acculturation Theory Framework. The writer utilized acculturation theory by Berry (1997) as a framework to analyze how Jin's cultural background might shape his parenting style and interactions with his family. Last step was Synthesis and Interpretation. The writer integrated findings from content analysis, thematic analysis, and the application of acculturation theory to draw conclusions about how Jin's cultural background shapes his approach to fatherhood.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research examines the portrayal of Jin Lee's fatherhood in *Turning Red*, utilizing film analysis and the framework of Acculturation Theory by Berry (1997). Our findings reveal a character who subverts stereotypes and offers a refreshing perspective on Asian fatherhood in modern media. However, to fully understand the significance of Jin's portrayal, we must delve deeper into the analysis and its implications.

In analyzing father's role in his daughter life, the movie uses two approaches; through photo and the dialogue. In spite of the limited scenes shown in the movie that specifically describe the interaction between father and daughter, they can show strong case of the meaning of relationship among them.

In the beginning of the movie minute 02-03, there are some photos that show relationship of parents and Mei-the daughter. They mostly show how actively mother involves in her daughter life while father can be seen involved passively during this phase of life. There are 3 pictures that show father's position that can be interpreted as his passive involvement in his daughter's life. One photo shows a situation where father only stand behind mom without interacting with daughter while they are having family photo. Another photo shows he stands behind mother when she feeds Mei. He looks his daughter dearly but does not interact with her. These scenes can be interpreted as the issue where Asian father's role during the beginning of his child life has no significant involvement especially in the term of physical interaction.

Another perspective of father's role in his relationship with his daughter can be seen in the scene when father is preparing for his family dinner (09.36-10.17). He praises Mei Lin who can make the dumpling by saying "perfect" shortly. It makes Mei Lin happy. Although he is not as talkative as the mother, his simple gesture can give kind of accomplishment that Mei always pursue.

When it comes to the situation where Mei Lin is having her period – in the movie it is metaphorically described as change into red panda – Father, who in the beginning is curious to find out what happen when he hear the shout, slowly walks backward when he realize that his daughter is having this phase. (16.33-17.18). when it is related to woman sexual phase, father tends to choose avoid this matter and leave it to mother. He feels uncomfortable to involve in it.

In minute 26.44-27.00 father comes to Mei's room and look out for the situation. He says to his wife "it's time". It shows that actually he knows the information related to his daughter but he needs to find the correct time to ensure his wife to give the information. This shows how he maintains his position that is not actively push his intention. During the explanation, father just stay silent and observe. He doesn't give any emotional support during this scene. There is one scene where he shows his subtle support to his daughter where he says "red is lucky color" (30.21). This is short statement that he says without explanation. Father is not as talkative as mother and he rarely show his affection through long speech or physical touch. However his attention to his daughter can be seen in subtle ways.

During mei lin proposal to ask her parents permission to attend a boy band concert, father read the brochure thoroughly while mother reject the ideas. Father tries to understand why his daughter likes the boy band. The he says to his wife "Ming, maybe we should trust her". Father is willing to give chance to Mei to pursue what she wants while still responsible with the risk and how she can manage that risk.

Beyond Stereotypes: A Supportive and Understanding Father

One of the most striking aspects of Jin's character is his subversion of the stereotypical Asian father figure often portrayed in media. Traditionally, these portrayals depict Asian fathers as

stoic, authoritarian figures focused on duty and achievement over emotional connection (Kim, 2008). However, Jin defies this stereotype by consistently demonstrating warmth, empathy, and a genuine desire to connect with his daughter, Mei. For example, during Mei's initial transformation scene, Jin remains calm and supportive. He prioritizes understanding Mei's experience over anger or punishment. Later, he acts as a mediator between Ming's stricter approach and Mei's emotional outburst, suggesting a willingness to bridge the gap between mother and daughter

Jin's communication style further cements his role as a supportive father. Unlike the stereotypical portrayal of Asian fathers relying on harsh commands, Jin utilizes humor and gentle guidance to connect with Mei. His playful demeanor during the "panda reveal" scene eases the tension and demonstrates his acceptance of Mei's unique situation (Scene Analysis: Temple Kitchen Reveal). This contrasts sharply with Ming's initial shock and panic, highlighting the difference in their parenting styles.

Balancing Tradition with Modernity: Acculturation in Action

Jin's characterization becomes even more nuanced when viewed through the lens of Acculturation Theory. As a potential first-generation immigrant, he likely navigates the complexities of integrating into a new cultural environment while maintaining his heritage.

The film offers subtle hints regarding Jin's cultural background. For instance, his traditional clothing during the temple visit suggests a connection to his cultural roots (Scene Analysis: Temple Visit). However, he also demonstrates acceptance of Mei's individuality and modern interests. He willingly attends her concert, even though it involves loud music and a chaotic environment (Scene Analysis: 4*TOWN Concert). This suggests a willingness to adapt and embrace aspects of Canadian culture for his daughter's sake.

Integration as an Acculturation Strategy:

Based on the film's portrayal, Jin appears to be navigating an integration strategy within Acculturation Theory. He maintains elements of his heritage culture while also integrating aspects of Canadian life. This approach is evident in his parenting style, communication methods, and overall demeanor. He bridges the gap between traditional values and modern expectations, creating a supportive and understanding environment for Mei.

CONCLUSIONS

This research examined Jin Lee's portrayal in *Turning Red*, demonstrating how it challenges stereotypes and integrates aspects of Acculturation Theory. Through his supportive and understanding nature, Jin offers a refreshing perspective on Asian fatherhood in popular culture. This analysis, while acknowledging limitations, highlights the film's contribution to dismantling stereotypes and promoting a more nuanced understanding of Asian families and fatherhood within media. Ultimately, Jin's character serves as a valuable springboard for moving beyond singular narratives and promoting a more nuanced representation of Asian fathers in film. While he offers a refreshing perspective, it's crucial to recognize the diversity of Asian fatherhood experiences. Further research, coupled with a conscious effort from filmmakers, could lead to a richer tapestry of Asian father figures on screen. This includes

exploring fathers from different generations, cultural backgrounds, and socioeconomic classes. By showcasing this diversity, we can create a more accurate and relatable portrayal of Asian families within media.

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