Managing Identity Crisis in *Turning Red* (2022)

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Abstract: The paper discusses how *Turning Red* (2022) works out various crises that center on the identity crisis of the female protagonist, Meilin Lee (Mei). At the core of conflicts lies the question of which identity and which way of life to choose: the "ancestral" Eastern, Chinese one or the modern Western, North-American one. This analysis presents how this Disney/Pixar animated film addresses the questions of multicultural, dual, hyphenated, diasporic identities as well as cross-generational conflicts through displacement. Mei Mei has to decide if she keeps her red panda (her Chinese part) or cuts herself off of it enclosing it into a talisman while leading an entirely American/Canadian way of life. Her choice is both, a decision that none of the women in her family made before her. Turning into a red panda can both be a curse and a blessing for the female family members and it seems that all of these women viewed it as a curse and a burden before Mei Mei reinterpreted it. While fighting her red panda, all of the female family members have to revisit their own 'red pandas' thus solving not only Mei Mei's identity problems but also questions of agency, including those of her mother, which affects all female family members leading finally to reconciliations. The solution to this identity struggle and to the cross- and transgenerational/cross- and transcultural fights over meanings and identities is resolved with the help of humor and peer support.

Keywords: *Turning Red* (2022), Asian-American/Asian-Canadian, Disney/Pixar, identity crisis, humor

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AMERICANA – E-Journal of American Studies in Hungary, Vol. XX1., No. 1., 2025
ISSN 1787-4637

DOI: 10.14232/americana.2025.1.49-58

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Turning Red (2022) is an animated film centered around various cultural and family issues rooted in the identity crisis of the female protagonist, Meilin 'Mei' Lee (Chiang). However, one of the turning points in this identity struggle is when viewers realize that Mei's problem is intertwined with that of her mother, Ming. Both are involved in a transcendental experience during the Red Moon Ritual of removing the red panda, when both of them resolve their dilemmas and make decisions about themselves that clearly demarcate who they are, while accepting and respecting the other's decision. As a consequence, there is a true reconciliation also among them and other female family members, who become part of this conflict since they are all bound by an ancestral heritage rooted in transgenerational traumas. The granted wish of being able to transform into a red panda is due to a crisis (actually war) conflict from many generations prior to these events when Sun Yee, a female ancestor, whished for a transcendental ability to protect her family and her village from the enemy through the spirit of a powerful red panda, so the red panda stands for a fierce warrior figure, who protects those in need. In this context, no Canadian-based, "Westernized" female family member respected this ability and they considered it to be a useless burden until Mei decided to be otherwise: she paid tribute to this ancestor and managed to reinterpret this red panda trickster ability as something that can have value in the new environment. The central question of the identity negotiation is whether to choose the "ancestral" Eastern, Chinese identity or the "modern" Western, North-American one to live with. Apparently, the ability to turn into a red panda is generally interpreted as a curse by the female family members in the Western world since the animal figure lost its original function and meaning in the new context. They all enclose their red pandas in beautiful jade talismans, which represent how they honor the tradition but still refuse to acknowledge its power and so, they seal it off as a relic of the past. However, Mei wants to keep her red panda and none of the women in the family understands or accepts this deed; they try to force Mei to shun her red panda and become totally assimilated into Western society.

This Disney/Pixar animated film expressively presents this type of identity conflict and the concerns with multicultural identities as well as cross-generational conflicts through displacement as the setting is Canada, hence the questions of American-Canadian identity issues are also addressed indirectly. However, this film is not simply about Canadian-Asian identity questions but more broadly, North-American identity despite the fact that this broader geographical location is not articulated in the movie. Apart from Toronto as the setting and Mei wearing pajamas with a red maple leaf on it, Canadianness is never mentioned in the film. Nevertheless, the animated film is an American cultural product since it is a Disney/Pixar production thus working with American concepts of identity. Hence, the identity struggles will be dealt with by presenting them as much rather a Western-Eastern conflict, not necessarily an American or Canadian one as opposed to the Chinese one(s), yet some specificities of Chinese culture will be touched upon that are necessary for the understanding of the cultural aspects represented in the animated film.

One of the most striking aspects of Chinese symbolism is the red color, so choosing red color as the protagonist's Chinese part is a powerful statement. The red color is central to Chinese culture and identity as people and a nation, and it is considered to be of high value in various aspects of life (including later cultural connotations of Communist representation, which will not be discussed here). The red panda is a major symbol since it is an animal that inhabits parts in Asia that are within Chinese territories and its figure is overshadowed by the giant panda that is generally viewed as the paramount symbol of China overseas. It is a remarkable move on the part of the film creators that they decided to opt for the red panda as a

cultural symbol, paying tribute to it and shedding light on the features and abilities of this animal. In this context thus, by remaining a shapeshifter, in her holding a Chinese red panda and a North-American human identity, Mei defies her current family tradition in the West and integrates her ancient Eastern heritage with her North-American identity in an almost magical realist way, bringing forth reconciliation and healing for all family members through the power of humor with which she enacts both at once.

Despite the deeper and actual roots of Mei's identity conflict concerning her heritage as well as the problem of which culture she wants to identify with, the surface problem appears to be her teenage crisis when everything changes in the life of a human. This delicate period in the protagonist's life is about transition, about turning into an adult, and becoming a grown woman. That is why, the surface problem seems to be coming of age in sexual terms exemplified by her menstruation, also symbolized by the color red. However, this is mostly played for laughs since Mei actually does not start to menstruate and there is nothing happening in the film signaling that she might actually be menstruating; it is only her mother's hysterical reaction, used for comic relief. Yet, the red color can be interpreted as the color of blood and sexual maturation as well as that of sexual arousal, the latter of which is also addressed in the intradiegetic narrative and usually presented in a cringe comedy manner to present the embarrassment and awkwardness involved in bodily changes and reactions of a teenage girl. On the surface, the problem appears to be whether Mei can control herself when her adolescence kicks in with all of its troubles, symbolized by her turning into a red panda. This way then, the red panda stands not just for her Chinese heritage but also for her rite of passage into adult womanhood, with all of the (un)pleasant and shocking bodily changes that Mei interprets as having turned into a smelly monster with anger management issues. The red panda thus stands for the raging animal inside that has to be controlled with all emotions because an ideal woman in any culture is considered placid and controlled. This also leads to another conflict of this transitional period: whether to remain a dutiful and loyal child to her family, especially to her mother by focusing on meeting all of her expectation or to rebel against everything that she considered her life to be and who she is up to that point by setting herself free in an individualistic manner, as she will not be mommy's little daughter any more.

However, what is more important is that Mei has to decide if she keeps her red panda (her Chinese part) or cuts herself off of it enclosing it into a talisman sealed off while leading an entirely Canadian way of life adopting an entirely North-American identity. Surprisingly, her choice includes both and this is a choice that none of the women in her family had chosen before. The older women in the family tried to conceal this unique emblem of their Chinese heritage while their major focus was to blend in and adapt to this new world as much as possible, for example, also wearing Western clothes and hairstyle. Although, it is true that Mei's mother, Ming, runs a Temple dedicated to Sun Yee – the ancestor from whom the protagonists' special ability originates – to pay tribute to their heritage and ancestors that function as a tourist attraction as well. In addition, Mei's family still lives in accordance with Chinese traditions except that it is the father, Jin, who cooks. They also know all Chinese traditions, songs and rituals, especially those surrounding the red panda phenomenon. Nevertheless, all of them shunned their Chinese ancestral part by hiding their own red pandas, which they closed into elaborate talismans of Jade and gold, a way to still show respect for their Chinese familial tradition and to keep up that special gift that runs in the family only affecting the female members.

To turn into a red panda can both be a curse and a blessing for Mei's female family members. Neither good or bad, originally it was a blessing, a magical ability that helped that first female ancestor to defend herself, her family and to protect other people as well as everything in her surroundings. Therefore, back in China, the turning into a red panda was viewed as something positive and valuable but, as it is also mentioned in the film, in the new world it became a curse because it lost its primary utility, that of the family defender, turning into a burden. This had to be shaken off, and since for Mei it cannot be shaken off since it is an organic

part of her life and body, she seals it off, too. While all of the women of her Chinese family viewed turning into a red panda as a curse and a burden, Mei reinterpreted it in a way that is relevant in her time as well and in the Western world. While fighting Mei's red panda, all of the female family members had to revisit their own pandas and so they helped solving not only Mei's problems but also those of her mother. As a result, family reconciliation is eventually achieved in a cross- and transgenerational conflict and traumas are resolved. However, most importantly, the key to the resolution was actually through humor. It is noteworthy to note that the way in which Mei managed to turn the red panda into a source of fun and empowerment in the new world was done not alone but with the help of her friends and through the encouragement of her own father, who saw this ability as a trickster source of fun and happiness. Apart from her father (who is not from the family that carries this genetic trait of turning into a red panda), Mei's other family members do not manage to help her in a successful way. They try to but their approach is not functioning; nothing seems to work that they suggest because they cannot handle the entire situation of the transformation. Similarly to Elsa's parents in Disney's *Frozen* (2013. dir. Chris Buck and Jennifer Lee), they basically view it as a neutral ability or rather as a gift-curse that can easily turn into a family curse. Similarly to *Frozen* (2013), where it is a sister, in *Turning Red* there is a peer or peers, Mei's friends, who help her realize how to handle her magical ability in a productive and proactive way. And, which is important, this happens through comic features of laughter and humor.

Turning Red is an American-Canadian coproduction even if it is advertised mostly as a Disney/Pixar animated film suggesting that it is basically an American cultural product while the setting is Canada, to be more precise, Toronto. Yet, even if Mei is seen once in a pair of pajamas that have a red maple leaf on it, Canadianness is not really addressed or dealt with. It is never mentioned whether her family consider themselves to be Canadians or whether being Canadians is of any importance to them. Canadianness in this film is treated with certain North-American vagueness, which follows an old pattern concerning the literary and cultural production of this part of the American continent, resembling the idea suggested about the Canadian novelist Morley Callaghan by the literary critic Robert Thacker (2004) when he was trying to define the Canadian identity: "[h]e was, after all, a Canadian – and in ways vexed and difficult to define, that meant he was a North American of another sort, one something like, yet different from, Americans from the United States" (184). Evidently, Thacker struggled with defining how or why Callaghan was different from Americans as such and eventually he did not manage to show it thoroughly. In connection with Margaret Atwood, Thacker also asserted that "part of Atwood's strength lies in her ability to caustically critique things from the United States – as a non-American herself she may be better able to see where North American culture is heading" (190). Seen from this perspective of a Canadian and American identity, the characters in *Turning Red* present a rather fluid North-American identity that is fused with their other ethnic or racial identities. Additionally, Jennifer Y Kim and Zida Shang opine that

> [t]he study on the Asian experience in the West is uniquely nuanced. In both the United States (US) and Canada, Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPI) and Asian Canadians, respectively, (hereinafter referred to as Asians) are praised as 'model minorities' that have 'made it' and hence do not experience discrimination (Suzuki, 2002). Notwithstanding the fact that the model minority myth was created to undermine the Black and Latinx movement for racial justice [...], it also created a false perception that Asians benefit from White privilege [...], and hence do not experience systemic oppression, (qtd. in Wu 2014, 888-889)

which shows that even in 2022, the year *Turning Red* was presented, authors researching Asian American identity questions suggested that there is not much point in differentiating between specifically Canadian and American differences concerning Asian ethnic groups.

The term, Asian American was coined by Yuji Ichioka during the 1960s as part of the anti-Vietnam war rallies and even if it was not the most perfect coinage it "became the accepted

descriptive term" (Lee 2006, 174) because it was a new experience which needed new definitions and names while they also felt as if "a brother fighting a brother" (Lee 175). When considering Asian American identities and social situation David Mauk and John Oakland's claim also applies. They write that

since the mid-1960s, the popular media have often depicted Asian Americans as the country's most successful ethnic groups, its 'model minority'. Their high median family incomes, unusually high level of academic achievement and low rates of unemployment, crime, mental illness and dependence on welfare have been held up as examples to other minority groups. (90)

Mei's family fits this above-mentioned pattern perfectly as they display high academic achievement: her mother lists her academic achievements during her school years especially in mathematics; and Mei excels in every subject at school. They evidently behave like model citizens and seem to be a relatively well-off middle-class family. Mei's life is full of duties and devotion to her family as a good Chinese-American, or more broadly, Asian American child. Moreover, regarding this identity trait, Janelle Wong et al. (2011) highlight the "high average economic and education achievement of the Asian American community" (5), which perfectly applies to Mei's family because even if they do not have enough money to restore the SkyDome after Ming destroys it in her red panda form, they still live in the suburbs and appear to have a high-median income. When defining the term Asian American, Wong et al. point out that even if it covers a very diverse group the people still belong to a "meaningful pan-ethnic category, Asian Americans" (10), adding that "Asian Americans share a history of racial exclusion from naturalization in the United States" and emphasizing that they were not eligible for citizenship until the mid-20th century because this group of people was considered rather "outsider" (12). Additionally, there was a certain segregation and racial discrimination on many, with many of them being excluded from many jobs, professions and being not allowed to live in certain territories, having to face housing restrictions, etc. (Mauk and Oakland 88-92). Lee suggests that there is a "longer history of coercion" concerning Asian Americans and that is why many of them "voluntarily embrace" a "strain of Americanism" so that they would be accepted (177), adding that "[t]he "model minority" has re-emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, revised to appeal to an idea of multiculturalism" (187). This can partly explain the identity conflicts about being Asian American in the US and Canada and whether the association of being the model minority is beneficial for them or not. However, striving to become accepted at extremely high social and personal cost, was probably part of the picture, which might explain why it was so tremendously important for all the female family members of Mei's family to shun their Chinese red panda and become as mainstream as possible. Additionally, acting like a model minority was better for them since through it they achieved a certain status.

In such a complex cultural context, Meilin Lee starts out as an excellent student and a dutiful daughter, who achieves the highest grades in every subject in school while having all kinds of extracurricular activities that she also refines to perfection. She is the perfect, dutiful daughter and the quintessential embodiment of the model minority by excelling in mathematics or playing music. After all her school work she also helps out at the family business and the temple run by her mother. Her mother is also acting as the ideal woman and the perfect mother and she was the perfect girl child as well, so she expects nothing less from her daughter. She already envisions that her daughter will be the UN Secretary General. At this point, the question arises: why she did not become that if she so wishes it for her daughter? This idea suggests that there is something beneath the surface of perfection, something that nobody talks about in the family, and secretly hope that they will never have to talk about it to Mei. However, fate happens.

Mei is 13, a teenager on the brink of womanhood. On the surface, the problem concerns growing up and maturity into womanhood: it is hinted that she starts to menstruate and to develop sexual interests. In reality, she does not start the menstrual cycle but many jokes are made around this topic in order to handle a taboo topic with humor and to make it more accessible for a new generation. In this situation, the redness of hinted symbolic menstrual

blood signals a change into a mature person, suggesting that Mei might not be mommy's obedient little girl anymore. This redness actually stands for the intradiegetic conflicts, inevitable changes and the culminating crisis in this story and manifests itself in the form of a red panda. The choice of the red panda is also central since it is an endangered species in China, and the film calls attention to it by highlighting not only its symbolic, cultural essence but also its ecological significance. As said before, Mei is turning into a disobedient young woman, who wants to pursue her own dreams. Her individuality opens up and that gradually collides with her mother's future vision for her. However, the underlying problem manifests itself in her red panda, which reflect a major identity crisis. She is not only struggling with her awakened sexuality and her potential fear of menstruation but this transitional period also places her at the crossroads of various identificatory processes, all at meeting points of various cultures: Chinese, Canadian, American, North American, Asian American, etc. As a result, Mei has to figure out who she is, who she wants to be, how she wants to identify with, what kind of identity she wants to project as a grown-up person, independent of her parents by reconciling the various, sometimes opposing, sets of ideals, values and expectations, and overall, whether she wants her Chinese heritage to manifest itself that is quite visually represented by a gigantic red panda. As we learn from the visual, animated story, the size of the red panda also reflects how powerful the person is and how big her gift is. All the women in Mei's family have different-looking and different-sized red pandas independent of their age, body shape, height, weight, familial position or social status, what appears to matter is the person's skills, abilities, personality and most importantly emotional control, most specifically her anger management. This implies that it is not the grandmother (who is supposedly the highest-ranking among them and the wisest) who has the biggest panda. Mei's panda is one of the biggest ones, but her mother's is the biggest. This animal appears to be cute and the filmmakers make use of this supposed cuteness but under the surface of this fluffy-cuddly appearance there is unbridled violence and rage ready to erupt. Pandas in *Turning Red* are mischievous, needing to be tamed. Hence, the crisis also involves controlling the panda's inner turmoil leading to the balance of cultures in which they are.

Mei goes through the ritual as all of women in her family and she has to have her own fight as they had their own fights but the biggest crisis seems is linked to Mei's mother, who did not learn how to handle the situation. Mei's mother almost killed her own mother, leaving her with a scar for the rest of her life and she has fought her own daughter as well. Mei has thus to fight a double battle: to struggle for defining her own identity and to gaining agency over her own life, through which her mother also manages to solve her own problems. The reconciliation between mother and daughter can bring peace to the whole family as well the resolution between the mother and the grandmother, who has already forgiven her because she loves her daughter no matter what she did – as we learn it at the end. Even if Mei is having a problem, in fact, it is Ming, her mother, who is the cause of all the problems. Similarly to the film, *Brave* (2012, dir. Mark Andrews and Brenda Chapman), here, it is a daughter likewise helping her mother to change and thus making her own life better and happier through this. It is a truly beautiful moment of feminist liberation when Ming and Mei are on opposing sides, and Mei leads her own mother from girlhood to adulthood towards the portal of change, helping her to overcome struggles and to come to terms with herself. At that point, Ming becomes peaceful and makes a decision about her red panda as fully grown up, with the adolescent Mei guiding her mother to reach actual maturity.

In the meantime, Mei decides to keep her own red panda, a decision that her mother finally accepts. It is so interesting to note that in Chinese-related American films, the mother-daughter relationship is of central importance and is presented in depth by addressing conflicts which unravel the intricate complexities of their relationship. Moreover, such stories are the ones who have the funniest grannies and par excellence women figures. Such is the grandmother figure the animated films of Disney's *Mulan* (1998, dir. Barry Cook and Tony Bankcroft) or Dreamwork's *Abominable* (2019, dir. Jill Culton), just to name two examples. In these stories,

intergenerational female family relationships are shown on multiple levels: these are not just mothers and daughters having to disentangle their relationship but grandmothers and granddaughters and even relationships with aunts, as this is the case with *Turning Red*. Lynda Haas points out about a Chinese-American cultural example concerning mother-daughter relationships that it resembles the fight of tigers, from which there is no escape; the analogy of the fight of predators is presented as inevitable in the case of mothers and daughters (1995, 208-209). In *Turning Red*, the tiger is replaced by red pandas but they still fight like wild animals posing a real threat. One such an example is in the fight at the SkyDome, when Ming almost kills Mei and everybody else, while destroying the building. Her mother's facial scar is also visible throughout the entire movie, a scar caused by Ming many decades ago as well. And similarly to the film *Brave*, where the relationship between the mother and the daughter is symbolized by a bear fight, in *Turning Red* there is a red panda fight literally causing harm and damage that they try to amend and correct together towards the end of the film. The mother-daughter relationship is not sugarcoated any more but it is shown in its true colors and through images that point out how hard work it is to keep a balance, to respect the other's choices and to manage the relationship.

The biggest decision is Mei's about accepting or refusing her red panda, her Chinese heritage. The crisis is around whether she wants to be a Western, North-American girl or she embraces her mixed heritage and cultural position. Interestingly, none of the female family members ever thought about keeping their pandas, so they hid it. Ming was always terrified that one day Mei's red panda might appear but she hoped that maybe it will not happen because Mei is geographically too far from their original culture. The grandmother knew that the appearance of Mei's red panda was inevitable and they even had debates about it. When Mei transforms into her red panda for the first time, Ming tries to keep it a secret but the grandmother finds out. When she calls her daughter, who even at that point tries to lie to her, the funny granny claims that she knows what is happening and Ming should not try to cover it up because they have to settle it together. Ming is trembling and is evidently scared when her mother calls, which implies how unwell Ming is and shows her fears concerning handling the situation in the present or in the past when she was a teenager. In spite of everything that had happened, all female family members travel there to perform the Red Moon Ritual that encloses Mei's red panda into a sacred sanctuary, all with the help of a shaman. Women declare that they are all family and they came to help, expect Mei to do the same and it does not occur to anybody that it could be otherwise—only to Mei's father, who knows her better than anyone. Women expect Mei to subdue her red panda as a decent woman integrated into a traditional, mainstream society because they think this makes a woman successful. Mei is not convinced that enclosing one's red panda is the best way to navigate between the Scylla and Charybdis of one's cross- and transcultural identity struggles. The protagonist wants to keep her red panda because she thinks she can handle it and can juggle the various aspects of her identity; however, she would like to please her family and that is why she agrees to the Red Moon Ritual. Yet, a seemingly tiny and insignificant moment occurs in the film when Mei is sitting with her father, Jin, in her room before the ritual starts and he talks about Ming's red panda. Jin does not have any problems with that side of his wife and encourages Mei to keep her panda. One of things Jin says is that Mei made him laugh with her panda antics and asks her to rethink whether she should close down that part of her where the passion and the fun lie. It is noteworthy to see in this Disney/Pixar film a very rare moment of teaching gender empowerment—and this is one of those, as female characters are rarely encouraged to be funny and praised for their ability to make others laugh.

The ritual has to be performed when the red moon is up through traditional movements, acts and chanting. Mr Gao, the shaman, tells the participants that any song would do if they sing it from their heart but the grandmother is old-school and so they have to do everything in a very traditional way. By failing to perform the ritual at their temple, because Mei refuses to go through with it again there, so they have to redo it again after all of the women transform back into their pandas, and in this configuration, they have to combine all Eastern and Western

elements to make it work. As a result, everybody in the stadium where a concert took place previously sing together all kinds of songs and pop songs harmonize with traditional Chinese chanting, and what matters, is that it has to be sung from the heart. Thus, all kinds of cultural elements mingle, and all kinds of people of various ages, genders, races and ethnicities sing together in a Western institution using traditional Chinese rituals to help these women work out their pandas. One of the most important intersectionality elements in all this is when the Chinese family's women enclose their pandas in all kinds of Western objects and not in the traditional, beautiful, elaborately-decorated golden and jade jewelry but into cheap 4Town necklaces, fan memorabilia or a even a Tamagotchi product. Thus, the cultural mix appears even on this level and through these items all women in Mei's family assume a culturally-mixed identity.

Thus, Mei embraced her red panda with all of its challenges, positive and negative sides, and embarked on a journey where she openly wore her Eastern cultural heritage embedded in her Western one. Thus, instead of "to be or not to be," she chose to turn red that is (Chinese), while also staying within her other realm, (Canadian, American) as a trickster and shapeshifter. She manages to travel between her various cultural realms and chooses to turn red when she wants to. She was the only one in her family who embraced both sides, learning to control, balance and bridge the different parts of her identity. The tool that helped her in this journey was humor and *Turning Red* is quite remarkable concerning women's humor because while there are ironic layers on the narrative level, humor especially focuses on the laughter generated and shared by the female characters. Female protagonists are not typically funny ones in Disney/Pixar animated films and there is hardly any female lead character, who produces humor or even laugh. This film is a real milestone concerning women's humor production because what helps Mei to really understand her red panda and also to handle it is the shared laughter and the consequent good feeling with her friends. Mei manages to channel her red panda power into something productive and constructive by generating fun and laughter. Her humorous antics and performances as a red panda makes everyone happy and she also turns the comic stance into a lucrative business: as a professional entertainer she is able to collect money for the 4*Town concert she would like to attend with her friends. The peak of this entertainment business is Tyler's birthday party, which is a disaster until Mei appears in her red panda form (because she is paid for it by Tyler whom she does not like but later befriends) and makes it a hilarious party. As Rebecca Krefting (2014) asserted, *humor genera* is still considered to be men's privilege (113), however in this film, the humor is mostly generated by the female characters, especially Mei. What is more, there are several scenes where female characters share unbridled laughter together, which might be, as Regina Barreca (1992, 1996) theorized, beyond decency. Within the world of Disney/Pixar, the female protagonists and major female characters usually adhere to regulations of decency in terms of humor but this film dismantles the rules and female characters pour forth all kinds of fun, making crises more workable for them.

Through Mei's decision to stay a red panda trickster figure with which she combines and manages various levels of identities, opting for a mixed identity, she also helps her other female family members to resolve many problems as well as transgenerational traumas and cultural conflicts. More importantly, besides family, her friends provide vital bonds, support and love for Mei during her struggle. She tries various ways how to manage her emotions and how to learn to control her red panda and her friends embrace her "monstrosity" by starting to laugh and have a lot of fun together. They tame the monster though their collective laughter and with the help of humor they all succeed in winning the situation. Barreca's claim is also fitting in this case when she writes that "humor allows you to have a perspective on an otherwise potentially overwhelming prospect" (1996, 9), and states that that humor has the potential to redeem a troublesome situation that might be lost to negative emotions otherwise (2013, xiv). This is what happens to Mei's red panda and this is how the crisis is resolved.

Besides the gendered empowerment and the power of the comic stance in lead characters shown above, another major achievement of Disney/Pixar in this animated film was that they

dared to make the mother a source of fun but not in a way to denigrate her. She is presented as somebody who is caring and anxious for her daughter's wellbeing but she mostly gets into ridiculous situations through an overprotective behavior when she mishandles either the pain meds or sanitary pads or when she misinterprets the signs of her daughter's budding sexual maturation. The mother is presented in humorous situations and the joke is sometimes at her expense. It is a major change because mothers are almost never made fun of or are making fun in Disney/Pixar animated films as mothers are generally viewed as serious, caring figures. An example in this regard are the regulations about women and humor from the earliest times of filmmaking (Stott *passim*, 2015) in presenting women as the ideal woman, the love interest, who would become the wife and mother, and who could not be considered comical. So, in American film history, for a long time it was forbidden to present mothers, grandmothers and wives in explicit comic situations, but this animated film does this in an exceptional way, making Ming a new type of mother in the Disney/Pixar universe, even if she is not the one to literally make the jokes.

The roots of why a woman is not supposed to be funny are very complex and this paper will not cover the topic but it is important to mention a few sources to understand why this animated film's achievement concerning women's humor is essential. Kristen Anderson Wagner asserts that the bias against women's comedic abilities has strong roots in patriarchal culture and this is present even in our current times. She writes that there "is the longstanding and deep-rooted cultural bias against women performing comedy. The idea that femininity is incompatible with humor dates back to before the nineteenth century and lingers to the present day" (2013, 40). Delia Chiaro and Raffaella Baccolini (2014), are also of the opinion that a woman producing humorous acts "against the status quo of female behavior" challenges "an unwritten law of female demeanor" (8). Sabrina Fuchs Abrams (2017), similarly points out that the reason why humor is considered to be "inaccessible to women" is since humor is traditionally associated with aggression, intellect and sexuality, and the ideal woman is incompatible with all this (2). She also adds that female empowerment is connected to humor and wit while female freedoms as well as power are always seen as "a threat to the existing patriarchal power structure," what is more "[l]augther can be seen as castrating and emasculating, a sign of intellectual and sexual potency" (2). This is why it is paramount that Mei's red panda is used for liberation and for empowerment with the help of humor and laughter and that we see these girls having unbridled fun rolling over with laughter. What is more, the girls and women in this animated film generate humor, they joke around and this matters for their representation because it alludes to gender equality. What is more, they all contribute to resolve Mei's identity crisis primarily through the power of humor.

In conclusion, *Turning Red* managed to break boundaries concerning the representation of women from various points of view while having a unique approach to women's humor as well as handling questions of mixed identities, cross-cultural conflicts and transgenerational trauma in a thoughtful and entertaining manner.

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