

## **The Complex Meaning of Identity Represented in "Wei" by Samuel Rustandi**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In every human society, family bonds are absolutely essential. The most influential and persistent relationships throughout the developmental lifespan are those within families. Moreover, family can serve as a mirror for an individual's identity. Through social status, culture, religion, tribe, and tradition, individuals' identities within their families can be defined. This condition is depicted in the Wei short movie. In this scientific study, the author aims to analyze how the complex meaning of an identity represented in that movie. In order to help the author doing this analysis, Mise En Scene approach from Manon de Reeper and Cultural Identity from Stuart Hall are used for this study. The result of this study indicates that this film represents the complex understanding of Indonesian-Chinese family cultural context.*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Families are the primary — and frequently the first — socializing force in an individual's life (Soliz & Rittenour, 2012). Individuals' development and well-being are inextricably linked to their family relationships (Floyd & Morman, 2014). Family is a source of social support during times of stress in one's life (Maguire, 2012), and their interactions shape their identity and inform individual identity construction (Bergen & Braithwaite, 2009). According to Segrin and Flora (2011), communication is critical in regulating, changing, and defining the family's current reality.

Family systems theory asserts that families have an interdependent structure defined by patterns, boundaries, messages, and rules (Kerr, 2000). Notably, individuals are viewed as inextricably linked to their network of relationships and are heavily influenced by their family of origin throughout their developmental stages. Thus, family functioning has a significant impact on individual development.

In this study, the author is interested in analyzing *Wei* short film. This film tells about a Chinese-Indonesian chef named Mr. Li who had a Pork Rib Soup restaurant. He alienated his daughter Mei because she married a non - Chinese man and converted to Islam. This movie depicts how identity and its elements extremely matter for an individual in the family context. This film attempts to represent the expectation of a father who wanted his daughter to inherit family tradition, belief and family business. However, as an Individual who has agency, Mei decided not to inherit what her family has, instead she chose to have a different path of life by converting to Islam and live with her own family and her new identity as a Moslem woman. This film illustrates complexity of disappointment, anger, loneliness and love in father-daughter relationship. Both the father and the daughter are in complicated situation that being juxtaposed as complex agents who fail to understand each other. There are two queries this film tries to address. The first is the complex meaning of an identity and the second is the complex understanding behind one's decision of an individual in choosing life path. Overall, this film raises

the consideration of acceptance, forgiveness and understanding of the idea of difference at any cultural context or at any certain family background and society. To support the analysis, the author used *Mise en Scene* approach from Manon de Reeper to see how the camera works and the dialogue contributes to this film and Cultural Identity theory from Stuart Hall to analyze how the complex identity represented in this movie.

Manon de Reeper (2016) stated that everything we see in a film or television episode is designed to fit on the screen. The creators consider every element depicted in that scene; nothing is coincidental. The term *Mise en Scène* refers to the director's vision for the scene and the film. The author influences the audience's cognition by deciding what is displayed inside the constraints of that screen. Almost as successfully as conversation and narrative, *Mise en Scène* can be used to convey meaning to the spectator. It is crucial to media and film studies analysis because it elucidates how to find relevant visual codes and how some may have used them to construct meaning (The Media Insider, 2020). Furthermore, Reeper (2016) highlighted that in order to aid in the analysis and comprehension of a scene, we must analyze who and what is present, as well as their relative locations – we must also consider makeup, expressions, costume, setting, look, props, sounds, and lighting. There are several elements that can be included in the film's analysis. They are editing, camera, and lighting.

First, editing. Editing is a process that reduces time and space to a logical series of photographs. By and large, it is seamless. It comprises segmenting and reassembling recorded film segments (shots) to maintain a sense of continuity and coherence. Typically, pictures are altered to create the illusion of a natural flow of events (Reeper, 2016).

Second, the camera. The camera is one of the most critical things to consider while analyzing a film. It contains information about shot kinds and camera angles. A shot is made up of one take. It can be used to build the scene or mood and to place the viewer within it. Meanwhile, the camera angle has a huge impact on the film's tone and virtually always conveys meaning.

The last, lighting. Lighting is crucial in establishing a film's tone or setting. Unexpectedly, even lighting can contribute to the creation of meaning in a film. Full-facial lighting attracts emphasis to a person's face and may provide an air of candor and truthfulness. Shadow and low contrast are typically associated with negative emotions, including dread, anger, and distrust (Reeper, 2016). These aspects may aid the author in doing the analysis. Furthermore, The Media Insider (2017) said that there are additional methods for deciphering cinematography. One of them is to give the shot meaning. Applying meaning to a shot determines how the film is attempting to communicate a concept, a message, or a meaning through the lens.

To analyze how the complex meaning of an identity represented in this movie, the researchers applied the theory of Cultural Identity from Stuart Hall. As Hall (1991:21) puts it: 'Identity is a structured representation which only achieves its positive through the narrow eye of the negative. It has to go through the eye of the needle of the other before it can construct itself.' Identity is always a temporary and unstable effect of relations that define identities by marking differences. Thus, the emphasis here is on the multiplicity of identities and differences rather than on a singular identity and on the connections or articulations between the fragments or differences. Agency, like identity, is primarily about the spatial relationships between places and areas and the distribution of people inside them. The articulations of subject positions and identities into specific places and areas - fields of activity - characterize agency as a human dilemma (Grossberg).

Identity is constructed through the 'interaction' of the individual with society. The subject retains an inner core or essence that is "a real me," but this is constantly shaped and modified by the 'outside' cultural environments and the identities they give (Hall, et.al., 1996). Hall divides Identity into three different concepts. The subjects are as follows: Enlightenment, Sociology, and Post-modern. The Enlightenment subject was based on a conception of the human person as a fully centered, unified individual endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness, and action, whose 'center' was an inner core that emerged with the subject at birth and continued to unfold with it, while remaining essentially the same - continuous or 'identical' with itself -

throughout the individual's existence. A person's identity was the basic center of the self. Then, the sociological subject reflected the increasing complexity of the modern world and the recognition that the subject's inner care was not autonomous and self-contained but was formed with significant others' who mediated to the subject the values, meanings, and symbols - the culture - of the worlds he/she inhabited. In this sociological view, identity links the 'inside' and the 'outside' - between the private and public worlds. The fact that we project 'ourselves' into these cultural identities while internalizing their meanings and values, thereby making them 'part of us,' helps align our subjective emotions with the objective 'places' we hold in the social and cultural world. Meanwhile, the postmodern subject is conceptualized as lacking a fixed, essential, or irreversible identity. Identity becomes a moveable feast': it is constantly produced and modified in response to how we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems in which we live (Hall, 1987). The subject takes various identities at various points in time, identities that are not centered on a coherent self.' Within us, competing identities tug in opposite directions, causing our identifications to fluctuate constantly. If we believe we have a coherent identity from birth to death, it is because we create a reassuring story about ourselves, or 'narrative of the self' (Hall, 1990). The fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity is a fantasy.

Hall (1990) also advocated for two distinct perspectives on cultural identity. Cultural identity, on the surface, is defined as a shared culture shared by a group of people who share a common history and heritage. In this context, cultural identity is defined by historical experience and adherence to a relatively stable and unchanging cultural code. While the second concept states that identity culture is not fully permanent (irreversible), it can change in reaction to how positioning and being the subject of ongoing history, culture, and power have played out. In other words, the first argument says that cultural identity exists, whereas the second argument asserts that cultural identity is developing. Cultural identity is a continuous identification process within a historical context and culture (Hall, 1990). Budianta et. al (2017) stated that when two groups of people from distinct natural landscapes and cultures come together to do things together, conflicts will inevitably arise due to miscommunications and controversies. The situation can deteriorate further if the conflicts are rooted in individuals' divergent personalities. Indeed, individual personalities could actually be the trigger of the confusing and complicated pattern of communication.

Hall concludes his argument by providing three hypothetical perspectives from which decoding could be done. This is partly to 'deconstruct the common-sense definition of "misunderstanding" (Procter, 2004). The dominant-hegemonic position is in which the viewer decodes the message using the codes established by the encoding process and the dominant cultural order. Hegemony is not a static entity but is constituted by a series of changing discourses and practices that are intrinsically bound up with social power (Barker, 2004). The negotiated position is a contradictory position in which the viewer can adopt or oppose the dominant televisual codes. It grants the privileged position to the dominant definitions of events while reserving the right to apply additional negotiated definitions to "local conditions" (Procter, 2004). The last is resistance. It occurs when a dominant culture attempts to impose itself without subordinate cultures. As a result, opposition resources must be placed outside the dominant culture (Barker, 2004).

## 2. METHOD

This research analyzed the complex meaning of an identity represented in the Wei short movie *Mise En Scene* approach from Manon de Reeper and the theory of Cultural Identity from Stuart Hall were used for this study. To figure out how the complex meaning of an identity represented in this movie, the author analyzed it by applying several stages for this research.

First, the author analyzed the Wei short movie using the film elements, *Mise En Scene*. The author analyzed the scenes, angles, camera, and editing on the movie. Second, the author connected the movie elements with the interpretation and cultural context of the typical of Indonesian-Chinese family. The last, the author concluded the whole observation as the

representation of the complex meaning of identity.

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

In order to fully understand the result of this research, firstly, the author observed the elements of the movie in the Wei scenes, angles, shots, lighting, editing, etc. This observation would be beneficial as it could help the author know how the complex meaning of an identity represented in this movie.

First, to see how the complex meaning of an identity represented in this movie, I started my observation from scene on minutes 2:35 to 2:46 (Figure 1).



**Fig 1.** Mr. Li was praying in his *altar*

In this scene, we will see a Chinese-Indonesian man Mr. Li was praying in his *altar*, a praying room. There was some incense and a candle. In this scene, it could be understood that Li is a Chinese ethnic that inherits his belief. The shot also focuses on the incense showing that it is an important material for praying. In a closer context, the Chinese people's traditional religious system is strongly influenced by the belief system associated with their ancestral homeland. Their religious system is based on a strong tradition derived from four sources; nature and spirit or ancestor worship (spiritism, animism, and pantheism), as well as the religions of Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism (Sembiring, K.B., 2017). In their altar, they usually provide some incense, 2 bottles filled with oil, spirit boards, candles, papers, and food. After some external research, those praying materials signify certain meanings. Incense is used as a means of prayer to the Creator. Two bottles containing oil symbolize a carefree existence and wish to have a healthy body. Then, food that is offered in form of fruit must be sweet as fruit symbolizes freshness and future sweetness. The last is two papers to be burned. The first paper is called Sium Kim or gold paper, and the second one is Toa Kim or large gold paper. They symbolize the gratitude (Sompotan, 2016).

Further observation reveals that this scene aims to demonstrate the cultural identity of a Chinese man who is greatly influenced by his ideology. As a result, Chinese culture, beliefs, and traditions dominate his life. Mr. Li is shown as an individual who possesses a dominant, consistent, and unchanging perspective on his beliefs, culture, and heritage. Thus, one could deduce from this situation that Mr. Li represents a typical Indonesian-Chinese family that values tradition, belief, and business.

According to some external study, the typical Indonesian-Chinese family practices Confucius values, which dominate many aspects of Chinese ethnic life, including social connections, organization, business, and management. Cheung and Chan (2008) assert that Confucius' leadership symbolizes morality, education, harmony, regulation, innovation, and the Confucian logic. Additionally, Hill (2006) asserts that the Chinese leadership is influenced by three Confucius principles: *te*, which refers to male-dominated power, *ren*, which refers to an ideal relationship between individuals based on virtue, humanism, and love, and *yi*, which refers to rules governing proper behavior, something that should be done for our own and others' benefit. Mr. Li's implementation of his Confucius legacy is demonstrated in this scene. He presides over all elements of the Indonesian-Chinese family. It is because Confucius is a cultural legacy that has influenced how the Chinese think (Lin, 2010). One of the most prominent aspects of Confucius's teachings in Chinese ethnic life is its emphasis on family. Mr. Li suffers from this

illness because he believes that family is the essential thing that can be inherited, including family tradition, belief, and business. They arrive in the form of exercises. If the Indonesian-Chinese family discontinues these activities, they will be viewed as having lost their familial essence. Mr. Li perceives his daughter's loss of family essence when she converts her life to that of a Moslem woman.

The second observation goes to the scene on minutes 04:28 (Figure 2).



**Fig 2.** Mr. Li's daughter Mei with her new identity as a Moslem woman

A Chinese-Indonesian woman dressed in a green hijab is visible in this scene. She is Mei, Mr. Li's daughter. She finds her way to his father's restaurant to bring him some food. However, Li's waiter Aan said her father refused to eat it, and her food would end up at the store next door. From the waiter's words, we could see that Mei is unhappy and lonely since her father does not acknowledge her concern. This sequence attempts to convey the complexities of her and her father's predicament. If we compare this situation to Hall's (1990) Cultural Identity, I perceive Mei as a self-contained individual. Mei defines herself as not always certain that cultural identity is unchangeable. Cultural identity, she believes, can evolve. As a result, Mei is aware that her life choices may impact her relationship with her father, as she has chosen not to inherit her family's possessions. She selected a different course in life by converting to Islam and establishing a new identity as a Moslem woman. As a result, she bargains with her family by appearing Muslim. She enjoys her new life as a Moslem with her new family. However, she is upset when his father refuses to accept her decision.

Closer examination reveals Mei as a character in the negotiated position. It is a contradictory situation in which the individual can adopt and oppose dominating codes. 'It privileges dominant definitions of events while reserving the right to apply them in a more negotiated fashion to "local conditions" (Procter, 2004). Mei attempts to adapt and overcome her father's objections to inheriting the family tradition and beliefs. As a result, she must accept the complexities of the father-daughter relationship, including disappointment, loneliness, and love. This condition could be addressed by stating that Mei also struggles with recognizing her identity because she believed her father would embrace her decision, but he did not. To summarize, Mr. Li and Mei now have distinct cultural personalities.

According to Budianta et al. (2017), when two groups of people from widely divergent natural settings and cultures come together to do things together, conflicts unavoidably develop due to miscommunications and disagreements. The issue can worsen further if the tensions are rooted in the conflicting personalities of the individuals. Indeed, individual personalities may catalyst the perplexing and intricate communication pattern. In this scene, we can see how Mr. Li's condition deteriorates as he observes his daughter leaving her Chinese roots in favor of a new family and a new identity as a Moslem. Both of them are unable to understand the other. As a result of this, they have disagreements.

The next observation is from the scene on minutes 8:25 to 9:37 (Figure 3).

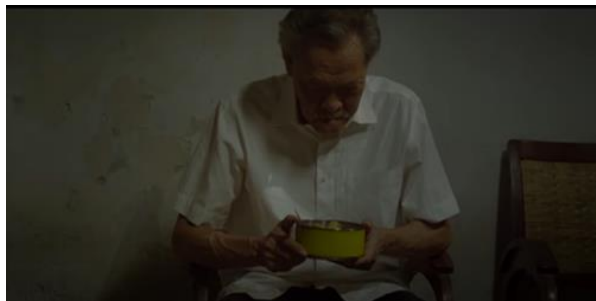


**Fig 3.** Mei with her complex situation

In this scene, Mei is lonely, unhappy, confused, and disappointed evidenced by her facial expression. She is depressed and perplexed, as her actions toward her family have elicited no favorable response from her father. Her father does not want to see her when she comes to the restaurant. Her father also does not want to eat the meal she often brings during Ramadhan. In her loneliness, she struck up a little chat with Aan, the waiter. "Does she consume my food?" inquired Mei. "He never eats your food," Aan stated. Hearing what Aan said only added to her loneliness and disappointment. However, her devotion to her father is unending. "It is fine if he ignores me," she stated. He is constantly my father." From this dialogue, it is clear that Mei is in a difficult circumstance. She has chosen to be a Moslem on her own. She opted to inherit the family business, religious beliefs, and culture. She stood her ground and recognized that her choice was the best one for her and her new family. A complex situation, on the other hand, never ends. He is confronted with a difficult circumstance and must demonstrate understanding due to her decision. She assumed that would be acceptable to her father, but it was not. Even though she is in a difficult circumstance since her father does not comprehend her choice, it does not diminish her affection for her father. She continues to adore her father. The action is then resumed with Mei and Aan's subsequent talk. "Will you make an offering to your mother?" Aan inquired. That is Cap. Tomorrow, depart." Mei simply ignored Aan and exited the restaurant after hearing what he said. This sequence, in my opinion, seeks to demonstrate that Mei is portrayed as an individual who believes she has chosen her new identity and does not wish to be influenced by others since she will always stand her own as a Moslem.

The concept of 'self-identity' refers to how we think about ourselves and construct unifying narratives about ourselves with which we identify emotionally. It is derived from our new understandings of ourselves in light of our past and ongoing circumstances in conjunction with our desired future path (Howarth, 2011). In this scene, I see that Mei loves her family, but it does not mean that she has to inherit her family beliefs and ideas. Thus, she stays on her ground becoming a Moslem woman as her new identity.

The next analysis is taken from the scene on minutes 14:15 to 13:56 (Figure 4).



**Fig 4.** Mr. Li with his complex understanding towards his daughter

The camera focuses on Mr. Li, who was looking at her daughter's meals. He appeared miserable and lonely. Finally, we can see that he ate his daughter's food for the first time, as he had never eaten it previously. Based on my interpretation, Mr. Li is truly saddened and disappointed by his daughter's choice. He believed Mei could inherit his convictions, traditions, and business. On the other hand, Mei follows her path, which leaves her father alone and angry. I think this scene attempts to convey a nuanced view of Mr. Li's identity. His expectation is a

dream. He cannot compel his daughter to do anything he desires.

According to Hall (1996), "Identity, in this sociological conception, bridges the gap between the 'inside and the 'outside' -between the personal and the public worlds. The subject, formerly perceived as having a coherent and stable identity, is fragmenting, consisting of multiple, sometimes contradicting or unresolved, identities. The identification process, by which we project ourselves into our cultural identities, has become more open-ended, flexible, and problematic." From this statement, it is possible to deduce that there has been a movement in how individuals perceive their identity between then and today. Individuals once had a solid and cohesive identity; however, that identity has become fractured and problematic as the process of identification has become more open-ended. Thus, I see that Mr. Li is also having difficulty establishing his and his daughter's identities. He had believed that his identity as a Chinese-Indonesian guy would remain steady and cohesive till this point. He assumed his daughter would concur and inherit whatever cultural context he possessed. However, the way we self-identify is evolving. It is not steady, and this condition affects his daughter Mei, who opted to follow the Moslem faith.

To support the author's analysis, the next observation is taken from the scene on minutes 15:54 to 16:23 (Figure 5).



**Fig 5.** Mei happiness during Eid Mubarak

In this scene, we can see that Mei enjoys living with her new identity as a Moslem. Having some meals together with family and relatives during Eid Mubarak is part of her tradition now. However, her happiness and togetherness with her family suddenly had changed when she saw a guest was coming to her house to bring some food in a food basket (Figure 6).



**Fig 6.** Mr. Li's waiter came to Mei's house

In this scene, we can see that Aan, Mr. Li's waiter came to Mei's house. Mei panicked and wondered what was inside the food basket, as evidenced by the scene. Moreover, she was shocked because it was the first time her father had served the food on Eid Mubarak. To my understanding, this scene aims to elevate the idea of forgiveness and respect in any cultural context. Mr. Li presents the food to his daughter on the occasion of Eid Mubarak as a sign of respect for Mei's new identity. He is unhappy with Mei's decision, but he cannot intervene because it is her daughter's. Apart from that, I observe that Mei believes her efforts have been rewarded. Mei seemed to have been successful in redeeming herself. Her father's return of food on Eid Mubarak reveals that he has forgiven and accepted Mei's decision to convert to Islam.

On minutes 16:37 to 16:50, we can see that Mr. Li gave Indonesian cuisine served during Eid Mubarak which were ketupat, Indonesian rice cake packed inside a diamond-shaped container of woven palm leaf pouch and *opor ayam*, traditional Indonesian boiled chicken with thick condiment from coconut milk to his daughter (Figure 7).



**Fig 7.** Ketupat and Opor Ayam given by Mr. Li

In my point of view, I see that this scene attempts to show the consideration of respect and forgiveness given by Mei's father. It is uncommon to see Li, who lives alone, show his respect for his daughter by providing her Eid Mubarak food. Before his wife passed away, he was enlightened by his wife, who taught him to understand opposing viewpoints and forgive one another. He now lives alone, and his solitude serves as a reminder of his wife. Thus, he did the same thing by giving his daughter Eid Mubarak meals.

The last observation is taken from the scene on minutes 17:59 to 18:08 (Figure 8).



**Fig 8.** Mr. Li with his complex understanding

The camera focuses on Li as he is looking at his daughter. He did not speak, but his facial expression indicated that Li was upset. He was disappointed that the sole child he expected did not share his ideas and beliefs. Li appeared startled. He, like his daughter, was in a difficult circumstance. They both struggle to comprehend one another. Li opposes his daughter's choice, and Mei tries to persuade his father. Closer examination of the term "resistance" reveals that it refers to opposition or insubordination that results from power and dominance relationships. Resistance takes the form of confrontations with and agreements with the ascending order (Howarth, 2011). To my mind, Li is portrayed as the character that emerges from his cultural identity's power and dominance connections. He perceives that his cultural inheritance is the most significant and hence views others as inferior. On the other hand, Mei is portrayed as a figure who is receptive to any cultural background. She negotiates with her father and tries to persuade him to accept her decision. While they both have distinct interpretations of their other's identity, this scene also emphasizes the issue of forgiveness and acceptance.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

To conclude, an individual's identity and components are vital in a family context. Family members must expect that their children will share their identity. They desire that their descendants receive their prosperity, tradition, culture, and beliefs. When they see their children have a different perspective on their identity, they must be disappointed, dissatisfied, and angry, as their cultural identity will not be passed down to future generations. However, each individual has the right to select their path in life. A well-constructed cultural identity can be altered over time. Everyone has the right to be an agency. However, it is also necessary to respect people's diverse cultures, traditions, and values to show that we are not judging them.

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