

When The Walls Speak: A Screenplay Exploring The Struggles of A Chinese-Indonesian Daughter in Interracial Relationship

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ABSTRACT

This creative thesis tells the story of a daughter from a Chinese-Indonesian family who faces many struggles when she gets into an interracial relationship. The story is told through a screenplay in the genre of family drama and romance. This thesis also brings attention to the experiences of minority daughters in cross-cultural relationships, which is something that is rarely shown in Indonesian films. Using Murray Bowen's Family Systems Theory (1966), the screenplay explores why the parents reject the relationship, what the daughter goes through because of it, and how she fights for their approval. The story shows that the parents' rejection comes from their anxieties due to past traumas and cultural expectations, which leads to emotional tension, unresolved issues, and a broken relationship with their daughter. In the end, the thesis shows how the daughter stands up for her relationship by practicing differentiation of self while maintaining emotional independence and having honest conversations with her parents and with the help of her supportive partner.

Keywords: Chinese-indonesian, daughter struggles, interracial relationship, minority representation

INTRODUCTION

Interracial relationships and marriages are slowly becoming more common worldwide, with 91% of Americans approving and 10.7% of Indonesian marriages being inter-ethnic (McCarthy, 2021; Drah, 2024; Utomo & McDonald, 2016, as cited in Yulianto et al., 2021). However, strong resistance remains, especially among Chinese-Indonesians who see such marriage as threats to cultural continuity and identity (Uyun, 2023, as cited in Pramudito et al., 2024; Azaria, 2022). Chinese-Indonesians preserve their heritage through family surnames and traditional rituals, which makes marrying outside the culture is seen as a threat to this continuity for future generations.

Interracial marriage between Chinese-Indonesians and non-Chinese Indonesians is often seen as a threat to cultural purity, with families viewing it as a betrayal of historical struggles (Ibrahim, 2022). This pressure is especially strong for daughters, who are expected to uphold the family lineage, particularly the *sei* or surname, which is typically lost if they marry outside the community (Yulianto & Faturochman, 2016). Parents tend to exert more control over daughters than sons, limiting their freedom in partner choice due to cultural and gendered expectations (Fišerová et al., 2023).

This work explores the struggles of Chinese-Indonesian daughters in interracial relationships, highlighting the emotional toll of navigating family expectations rooted in tradition and identity. The creative work will be in the form of a screenplay, as film allows conflicts to be externalized visually and emotionally through action and dialogue (Pajkovic, 2023; Mason, 2023). Using the "show, don't tell" principle, film makes it easier for audiences to engage with the characters' growth and emotional journey (Perelman, 2021). The screenplay will be under family drama as the main genre and romance as the subgenre to explore

generational conflict, cultural tension, and the evolving bond between the couple (Cornish, 2014; Buffam, 2011).

In this work, there are three questions raised: a) Why Amelia's parents reject Amelia's relationship with a non-Chinese-Indonesian partner, b) What struggles Amelia experiences from the rejection, and c) How Amelia overcomes the rejection and struggles as well as fight for Amelia's parents' approval of their relationship. The purpose and answer for the questions are: a) Amelia's parents reject her relationship with Aditya because they project their own anxieties and expectations into the relationship, b) Amelia struggles with emotional distress, unresolved issues, and strained relationships as the result of her parents' rejection, and c) Amelia fights for her parents' approval by practicing differentiation of self, maintaining their emotional independence while engaging in open dialogue to bridge cultural gaps and address her parents' fears.

Some movies that portray similar topics as either the central or subplot of the films are *Cin(T)a* (Simanjuntak, 2009) and *Cek Toko Sebelah 2* (Prakasa, 2022). *Cek Toko Sebelah 2* (Prakasa, 2022) mentioned a topic about interracial relationship through Yohan and Ayu's relationship, while *Cin(T)a* (Simanjuntak, 2009) places an interracial relationship at the heart of its narrative through Cina and Annisa's relationship. This creative work, however, will focus specifically on the relationship between a Chinese-Indonesian woman and a Javanese man, highlighting parental rejection, personal struggles, and their fight for acceptance. It will be published through digital platforms and film festivals to reach a wider audience.

The story will be about Amelia, a 28-year-old Chinese-Indonesian woman, struggles with her parents' disapproval of her relationship with Aditya, a Javanese man. Lydia, her mother, tightens control, while Amelia begins to question if love is enough. After distancing herself from both Aditya and her family, Amelia finally breaks her silence, asking for her parents' blessing. A heartfelt talk with Lydia opens the door to reconciliation, as the family takes its first steps toward accepting love across cultural lines.

Family System Theory

The work will use Family System Theory by Murray Bowen (1966), which is a theory that falls into system theory within the broader field of family therapy and psychology, particularly within the field of psychotherapy and counseling. The theory has eight key concepts, including family projection process, emotional cutoff, differentiation of self, triangulation, nuclear family emotional system, multigenerational transmission process, sibling position, and societal emotional process (Mave, 2024). To answer the questions raised above, the key concepts that will be used are family projection process, emotional cutoff, and differentiation of self.

Family Projection Process

The family projection process explains how parents transfer their emotional anxieties to their children, often shaping their development and self-perception (The Bowen Center, 2021; Metcalf, 2019). This typically involves three steps: fixation on the child due to fear, interpreting the child's behavior as confirmation of that fear, and treating the child as though something is wrong (The Bowen Center, 2021b).

In cases like interracial relationships, parents may view a child's partner as a threat to family values, interpreting normal behaviors as signs of poor judgment and reacting with

criticism or control. This dynamic creates communication breakdowns, leaving the child feeling misunderstood or pressured.

This key concept is used to answer the first question, which is also shown through Amelia parents' rejection of her partner reflects this process, as they project their fears and cultural expectations onto her, believing she must marry within their ethnicity.

Emotional Cutoff

Emotional cutoff is a coping mechanism used to manage anxiety in family relationships, often through physical or emotional distance (Bowen, 1978, as cited in Kennedy, 2021; Friesen, 2014). It usually occurs in response to conflict or rejection and provides short-term relief, but long-term consequences include unresolved issues, emotional distress, and strained family bonds (Chesson, 2023; Guzman, 2024).

Emotional cutoff can reduce emotional support, heighten anxiety, and hinder the ability to form healthy relationships, especially when individuals carry unresolved wounds into future connections (Cohen, 2024; Chesson, 2023). It is closely tied to low differentiation of self, where individuals unable to balance emotional connection and independence become overwhelmed and choose withdrawal (Bowen, 1978; Friesen, 2014).

This key concept is used to answer the second question, which is shown through Amelia, who withdraws from her parents after rejection, leading to emotional distress, isolation, and tension in her relationship with Aditya, which highlights the lasting psychological impact of emotional cutoff.

Differentiation of Self

Differentiation of self refers to a person's ability to separate their thoughts from emotions while staying connected with others (Titelman, 2014; Inakha, 2024). People with high differentiation manage emotions well, assert themselves calmly, and maintain autonomy in relationships, whereas those with low differentiation are more emotionally reactive, enmeshed, or controlling (Calatrava et al., 2022; Mave, 2024).

The concept includes five key dimensions: emotional reactivity, I-position, fusion with others, emotional cutoff, and dominance over others (Dolz-del-Castellar & Oliver, 2021). Each dimension affects how individuals navigate family tensions, assert identity, and maintain emotional health.

This theory is used to answer the third question through each character's level of differentiation. Amelia and Aditya reflect different levels of differentiation. In the creative work, Amelia shifts from high to low as family pressure weakens her emotional independence, before gradually recovering with Aditya's support. Aditya consistently shows high differentiation, calmly advocating for their relationship despite resistance. Lydia begins with rigid rejection (high I-position) but softens slightly, while Hendra fluctuates before eventually supporting their union.

CONCEPT OF CREATIVE WORK

The creative work will use family drama as the main genre, a subgenre that centers on real characters and emotional struggles within families (Davis, 2023). These stories often explore conflict, personal growth, and moral dilemmas among relatives. The tension between

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Amelia and her parents, Lydia and Hendra, drives the plot as she navigates their rigid expectations, especially regarding her love life, and her desire to choose her own path.

The story captures not just loud arguments but also quiet emotional weight, showing Amelia's efforts to balance self-identity and family loyalty. At the heart of this narrative is also a romantic subplot between Amelia and Aditya, whose relationship is tested by cultural differences and parental rejection, ultimately portraying their efforts to stay together and remain emotionally connected through adversity.

To effectively deliver the story, two key cinematic techniques will be employed: montage and emotional pacing. Montage is a method of combining short, rhythmically arranged shots to convey meaning or move the plot (Straub, 2022). This technique will be used to depict Aditya's sincere efforts to win over Amelia's parents through a series of scenes highlighting his kindness. This approach captures essential moments efficiently and emotionally.

Another technique that will be used is emotional pacing, which will guide the rhythm of the narrative, allowing scenes to linger and reflect the characters' inner states. One example of emotional pacing being applied in films is from *Lost in Translation* (Coppola, 2004). As seen in *Lost in Translation* (Coppola, 2004), slower pacing invites the audience to absorb emotional depth more fully (Winter, 2024; Darke, 2024), making it a fitting choice for a story centered on intimate relationships and personal struggles.

The screenplay draws inspiration from *Selamat Pagi, Malam* (Kuswandi, 2014) and *Crazy Rich Asians* (Chu, 2018). From *Selamat Pagi, Malam* (Kuswandi, 2014), it adopts the emotionally introspective tone, relationship-focused theme, and slow, reflective pacing to create a realistic and intimate atmosphere. However, unlike the film's multiple plots, the screenplay centers on a single narrative, which is Amelia and Aditya's conflict with her parents.

Meanwhile, *Crazy Rich Asians* (Chu, 2018) influences the cultural context and the idea of silent parental approval, inspiring a pivotal scene where Amelia's father supports her relationship without direct dialogue. In contrast to the film's grand visuals, the screenplay remains grounded in everyday, emotional settings.

Premise and Creative Principle

The premise of the creative work is stated as Amelia, a Chinese-Indonesian woman, struggles between love and family as she seeks her parents' approval of her relationship with Aditya, a Javanese man, while navigating cultural expectations and emotional distress. The story aims to show why Chinese-Indonesian parents disapprove of their daughter's non-Chinese-Indonesian partner, the struggles faced by the daughter, and how the couple navigates the struggles to gain parental approval.

Synopsis

Amelia, a 28-year-old Chinese-Indonesian woman, faces her parents' disapproval when they forbid her relationship with Aditya, a Javanese man, fearing cultural differences and past trauma from the 1998 riots. As her mother, Lydia, tightens control, Amelia begins questioning if love is enough. After a painful visit to Aditya's family and growing emotional distance, Amelia reaches her breaking point. Her father, Hendra, urges Lydia to reconsider. After weeks of no contact, Aditya finds himself at Amelia's house to beg for a chance, but there is no clear answer from Lydia and Hendra. Meanwhile, Amelia finally breaks the silent war and admits her loss to her parents while asking for their blessings and fighting for her relationship for the last time.

Characters

Amelia

Age: 28 years old

Amelia is a Chinese-Indonesian only child who embodies quiet elegance and emotional depth. Raised with strong traditional values, she feels confined by her parents' expectations, especially regarding her career and love life. Though empathetic and emotionally intuitive, she struggles to balance her independence with her family's cultural expectations, and most notably in her relationship with Aditya.

Aditya

Age: 29 years old

Aditya is a kind, easygoing man with Javanese roots, known for his warmth and casual style. His open-minded and compassionate nature contrasts with Amelia's traditional upbringing. Though their cultural differences cause tension, he remains committed and supportive, respecting her need for independence.

Lydia

Age: 54 years old

Lydia is a traditional Chinese-Indonesian mother who values family duty and cultural heritage. She shows love through high expectations, especially in Amelia's life choices. Though caring, her strict views often clash with Amelia's need for independence.

Hendra

Age: 56 years old

Hendra is a reserved Chinese-Indonesian businessman who values hard work, tradition, and family. He shows love through quiet support and action, often deferring to Lydia's stronger voice. Though not outspoken, his care for Amelia is steady and rooted in responsibility.

Mega

Age: 35 years old

Mega is Amelia's lively and confident cousin who values family and tradition. Often the center of attention at gatherings, she brings energy and charm, though her teasing can be overbearing. In her mid-30s, she's stylish and outspoken, frequently commenting on Amelia's life choices, especially about her being single.

Cindy

Age: 32 years old

Cindy is kind and soft-spoken, often speaking for herself and Matthew with calm positivity. With long dark hair and a simple style, she's known for her quiet warmth and supportive nature.

David

Age: 35 years old

David is quiet and observant, often surprising others with his dry humor. With short dark hair and a smart-casual style, he respects tradition but prefers a relaxed, modern lifestyle.

Matthew

Age: 34 years old

Matthew values meaningful conversations and avoids the spotlight, preferring to let others take the lead. With short dark hair, a neat beard, and a casual style, he's thoughtful, polite, and quietly present.

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Ani

Age: 30 years old

Ani is Aditya's cousin. She is friendly and likes to connect with new people. She is talkative, but sometimes she forgets to pull the brake when talking, which results in making the situation awkward accidentally.

Ayu

Age: 57 years old

Ayu, Aditya's Javanese-Sundanese mother, has a soft face, warm eyes, and neatly styled short hair. Supportive and gentle, she encourages Aditya and Amelia's relationship with kind words and thoughtful advice.

Yudha

Age: 60 years old

Yudha, Aditya's Javanese father, is reserved and soft-spoken, with graying hair and wise eyes that reflect his calm strength. Though quiet, he is open-minded and thoughtful, offering steady support through his quiet presence.

Conflicts

In the creative work, three types of conflict are involved, mainly man vs. self and man vs. man. The man vs. self conflict focuses on Amelia's internal struggle between staying true to her relationship with Aditya and seeking her parents' approval. She feels torn between following her heart and fulfilling her family's expectations, experiencing both guilt and frustration (Alfarisi et al., 2022). The man vs. man conflict, on the other hand, involves external clashes, particularly between Amelia and her parents, Hendra and Lydia, who disapprove of Aditya. Tension also arises between Amelia and Aditya as their relationship is strained by frustration and misunderstandings (Putra et al., 2022). Although both types of conflict appear in the story, man vs. man plays a more dominant role, shaping the climax and resolution.

CONCLUSION

This creative work explores the struggles of a Chinese-Indonesian daughter, Amelia, who dates outside her ethnic group. Using key concepts from Family Systems Theory, the story is analyzed through three parts: why, what, and how. The "why" is seen in the Family Projection Process, where Amelia's parents, Lydia and Hendra, project their fears, especially Lydia's trauma from the May 1998 riots, onto her relationship with Aditya. The "what" focuses on Amelia's emotional response, shown through Emotional Cutoff, as she distances herself from both Aditya and her parents. The "how" is explored through Differentiation of Self, as Amelia gradually learns to balance her own identity with family expectations, and Lydia becomes more open to change.

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