

INTEGRATION AND ASSIMILATION AS THE IMPACTS OF DIASPORA EXPERIENCE REFLECTED IN THE WANG FAMILY IN THE FAREWELL (2019) MOVIE

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Abstract

This study analyzes The Farewell movie by focusing on the impacts of diaspora experience perceived by the Wang family using Berry's theory. Data of this study is obtained through dialogue and monologue from the movie script. This study is qualitative research through the process of collecting data qualitatively and reporting it descriptively. This study shows how diaspora issues related to integration and assimilation as the impacts of diaspora experience are reflected in The Farewell movie. The results of this study show that the first-generation diaspora experienced cultural integration while the second-generation diaspora experienced cultural assimilation.

Keywords: diaspora, integration, assimilation, The Farewell

INTRODUCTION

Through the centuries, the concept of diaspora has a very specific meaning, which is the exile and forced dispersal of Jews from their homeland to various countries. In other words, the Jewish diaspora phenomenon has become the basis for diaspora studies and is considered important in defining the term "diaspora". However, the term diaspora evolves, no longer referring specifically to Jewish exile, but now encompassing various groups of people. In the book entitled *The Dispersion A History of the Word Diaspora*, "At first sight, Safran emphasises the lack of attention accorded to diasporas in studies of nationalism as a result of the very specific sense that it had carried, that of the Jewish diaspora, before noting that, like ghetto and genocide, diaspora had been used, metaphorically, to describe a number of categories of individuals: "expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, and ethnic and racial minorities tout court" (Dufoix, 2017, p. 351). In addition to exile events, there are also several factors that influence a person's decision to move to a different geographical area. "These can be push factors such as political instability, civil

conflict, forced migration, a lack of job opportunities, famine, or pull factors such as stability in the new country, higher pay rates or better opportunities" (Fernie and Pitkethly, as quoted in Blazhevskaja, 2017, p. 51). It is indicated that the common factor in a person's decision to move is the desire for a better life.

It becomes interesting when associated with the diaspora because it is closely related to the diaspora experience, the diaspora process itself. The experience of migration often brings confusion to diasporas. Adapting to a new environment involves profound changes to various aspects of their lives, such as culture. "Cultural changes include alterations in a group's customs, and in their economic and political life" (Cormoş, 2022, p. 2). Such significant changes often lead to challenges and obstacles in living in a new country.

Individuals or groups who decide to leave their homeland, whether due to economic, political, or social factors or hope for a better life, will experience a complex adaptation process and identity transformation. "In a more general context, identity changes are noticeable with the integration in the country of migration, through adaptation to the new social environment, acceptance of reference models from other environments/social groups, integration and assimilation into another professional group or work group, learning another language, new social relationships, acceptance and appropriation of other norms, and rules and principles of life" (Cormoş, 2022, p. 2). In other words, changes in diaspora identity take the form of cultural integration and assimilation, where cultural integration and assimilation are the impacts of the diaspora experience.

Diaspora identities are formed through the various challenges they face when adapting to the host land. One of the challenges often faced by diasporas is the clash between two cultures, namely the culture of the homeland and the culture of the host land. This clash directly affects their adaptation process to the new community environment. Therefore, through the diaspora experience, diasporas shape their identity and feel the impact of that experience, one of which is cultural integration. In the journal *The Processes of Adaptation, Assimilation and Integration in the Country of Migration: A Psychosocial Perspective on Place Identity Changes* by Cormos (2022), Berry defines Integration as the result of an attraction to adopt both identities (p. 2). Furthermore, Waters and Pineau (2016) argue that Integration is a dual process, that is, the integration process does not only involve one party, but two parties that interact with each other and experience change (19). This clarifies that immigrants who come to a new country will experience a process of adaptation and change. They need to adjust to a new culture, a new language, and a different way of life. Moreover, "the integration option implies some maintenance of the cultural integrity of the group (i.e., some reaction or resistance to change) as well as the move to become an integral part of a larger societal framework" (Cormoş, 2022, p. 4). Thus, from the statements above, it can be indicated that cultural integration means maintaining the homeland culture and accepting the host land culture as a form of adaptation and becoming part of the host society.

Apart from integration, assimilation also plays a very important role in the adaptation process of the diaspora in the host land. In the journal "The Processes of Adaptation, Assimilation and Integration in the Country of Migration: A Psychosocial Perspective on Place Identity Changes" by Cormos (2022), Berry defines assimilation as adopting the culture of another group while relinquishing membership in the first culture (p. 2). Thus, assimilation due to the diaspora experience involves major changes in various aspects of diaspora life, from language to life values to culture. Furthermore, Herberg in the journal *Immigration restrictions and second-generation cultural assimilation: theory and quasi-experimental evidence* by Galli and Russo (2018) argues assimilation occurs when minority groups abandon their own cultural traditions and practices and choose to adopt the cultural norms and values of the dominant society in the host country (p. 2). Park states that assimilation entails completely assimilating into the host society by relinquishing one's previous ethnic and cultural identity (as cited in Baldatun & Murtiningrum, 2020, p. 54). Thus, it shows that assimilation encourages diasporas to abandon their homeland identity and fully integrate into the host country's culture.

This phenomenon of cultural integration and assimilation can occur because of cultural differences between the homeland and the host land culture. In other words, there are several cultural distinctions among all nations, each with traits representing attitudes, behaviors, traditions, and even the regional myths. Therefore, there are many ways to enhance, introduce, convey messages, and appreciate the culture itself with something pleasant that makes the audience can easily get a better understanding of the diverse cultures and appreciate the cultures that exist in this world. One of the best ways to get to know the global culture is through movies. Through movie, stories can be told in an emotional and profound way as movie is a powerful medium to explore social issues, especially in depicting the reality of diaspora that is full of identity challenges, alienation, and the struggle to find a place in the new world.

The phenomenon of cultural integration and assimilation as the impacts of diaspora experience appear in *The Farewell* movie. In addition, there are also previous studies that discuss the impact of diaspora, such as in the journal by Ikhsan Baldatun, "Assimilation as the Impacts of Diaspora Reflected in Mrs. Parker's Family in *Karate Kid* Film" and "Manifestation of Diasporic Sensibilities and Acculturation in the Film *Lion*" by Divya Dinesan. Due to the impact of the diaspora experience, one of the things that still happens is the desire for a better life, which is also clearly seen in the two previous studies. Therefore, it is the reason for choosing the object and topic of this study. In addition, the use of Berry's acculturation model (Krsmanovic, 2020) provides a framework for understanding how diaspora members adapt to the new culture. Unlike previous studies (Baldatun & Murtiningrum, 2020; Dinesan, 2021), which focused on broader migration patterns, this study applies Berry's model to movie analysis, which offers a unique perspective on how differences in cultural adaptation between first- and second-generation diasporas manifest in media representations.

The Farewell is a drama movie directed by Lulu Wang and released in 2019. The movie tells the story of a Chinese family who moves to the United States for a better life.

Haiyan, Jian, and Billi are members of the Wang family who face cultural dilemmas and diaspora experiences. The Wang family has lived in America since Billi is seven years old. Then, after being in America for years, they return to China to attend the wedding of one of their relatives. However, the wedding is just an excuse. The main reason they return to China is to gather with extended family because Nai Nai (mother and grandmother) has stage 4 lung cancer. When they return to China, they feel the differences between Chinese and American cultures. In this movie, we see how they grapple with these cultural differences. Inner conflicts arise when family traditions conflict with American values. Haiyan and Jian, the first generation of the diaspora, experience cultural integration, while Billi, the second generation of the diaspora, experiences cultural assimilation. This happens because Haiyan and Jian are more exposed to Chinese culture, while Billi is more exposed to American culture because she grew up in America. This study examines how first- and second-generation diaspora members experience cultural integration and assimilation, using Berry's acculturation model to analyze the dialogues and monologues in *The Farewell* (2019). Unlike previous studies that discuss diaspora adaptation broadly, this study focuses on the different impacts of diaspora experiences perceived by different generations within the single family.\

METHOD

This study used a descriptive qualitative research methodology. "Qualitative research is used to comprehend how individuals perceive their surroundings" (Ugwu & Eze, 2023, p.20). Hence, this showed that qualitative research aimed to gain a deeper understanding of something that happened in social life through behavior, perspectives, and actions. This study uses qualitative research methods, using thematic analysis to identify patterns in dialog that reflect integration and assimilation. Data selection was based on the frequency and thematic relevance of key quotes relating to cultural adaptation. To ensure reliability, the selected data were reviewed by two independent researchers to maintain consistency in interpretation. This research method used *The Farewell* movie script to analyze and interpret the research data to describe cultural integration and cultural assimilation as impacts of the diaspora experience.

This study took five steps to collect data, namely: 1) watching the movie, 2) reading the movie script, 3) identifying the data, 4) classifying the data, and 5) reducing the data. The first step was watching the movie, in this case, *The Farewell*. This was intended to increase knowledge about the movie, from content to conflict, related to the problem formulation. After watching the movie, was reading the movie script. Reading the movie script was intended to explore and collect quotes that would be used as data. The third step was data identification, at this stage it was done by marking the data that has been obtained from the process of reading the movie script. The fourth step was data classification, at this stage the data had been classified based on the problem formulation, in this case, assimilation and integration. The last step was data reduction, at this stage the data that had been obtained and classified would be re-selected and only strong data would be included in the findings and discussion.

The data in this journal were taken from primary data and secondary data. Primary data were taken from The Farewell movie script while secondary data were taken from several journals and e-books related to cases and theories.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Haiyan and Jian Integration

Berry defines the types of changes that result from sustained group contact, one of which is integration, "Integration can be recognized when an individual simultaneously maintains their cultural heritage while developing a relationship with the host society." (as quoted in Krsmanovic, 2020, p. 957). The Farewell movie is a depiction of cultural adaptation experienced by the diaspora. This is represented by a Chinese family who moved to America, and after living in America for a long time, they received bad news about their Nai Nai's health in China, so they had to return to China for a while. This situation makes them feel the clash between two different cultures. In this movie, Haiyan and Jian, the first generation of the diaspora, are shown experiencing cultural integration. Haiyan and Jian's adherence to Chinese Confucian values is clear evidence of the cultural integration they experience.

Chen stated that "Confucianism is based on the principles of the good life, loyalty and respect for older persons and family, as well as encouraging harmony and altruism" (as quoted in Badanta et al., 2022, p. 2680). This implies that Confucianism is family-centered decision-making. In China, Confucianism is strongly related to health, where families will apply Confucianism when a family member suffers from a deadly disease such as cancer. "In clinical practice, the family plays a pivotal role in health care decisions, in a way that the family informed consent is more important than the personal informed consent" (Cong, as quoted in Badanta et al., 2022, p. 2684).

1. Haiyan`s Integration

"Integration can be recognized when an individual simultaneously maintains their cultural heritage while developing a relationship with the host society." (as quoted in Krsmanovic, 2020, p. 957). The quotation below presents data that proves that Haiyan as one of the main characters experiences the cultural integration. The data displayed here is the result of selection to show how Haiyan's character brings integration within himself.

BILLI : I need to call her...
HAIYAN : No, Billi...
BILLI : I need to see her!
HAIYAN : You can't do that.

HAIYAN (CONT'D): She doesn't know... And the family thinks it's better not to tell her. So you can't say anything.

(Wang, p. 13-14)

Cultural integration is shown when Haiyan forbids Billi to call her grandmother, who is suffering from stage four lung cancer. Haiyan forbids it because this is a family decision and they must obey it. Here, Haiyan shows Chinese Confucianism culture that is the family center in decision making, where he complies with the family's decision not to tell Nai Nai about Nai Nai's disease. This is in line with what Cong says, "In clinical practice, the family plays a pivotal role in health care decisions, in a way that the family informed consent is more important than the personal informed consent" (Cong, as quoted in Badanta et al., 2022, p. 2684). This shows that Haiyan experiences integration, as Berry says, "Integration can be recognized when an individual simultaneously maintains their cultural heritage while developing a relationship with the host society." (Berry, as quoted in Krsmanovic, 2020, p. 957). Thus, these findings are in line with Berry's (1997) framework, which states that first-generation migrants are more likely to integrate, while second-generation migrants are more often assimilated. However, unlike previous studies that have focused on cultural preferences that tend to be passed on to children (Galli & Russo, 2018), this study reveals that integration and assimilation can occur within the single family, depending on the level of cultural exposure.

2. Jian's Integration

"Integration can be recognized when an individual simultaneously maintains their cultural heritage while developing a relationship with the host society." (as quoted in Krsmanovic, 2020, p. 957). The quotation below presents data that proves that Jian as one of the main characters experiences the cultural integration. The data displayed here is the result of selection to show how Jian's character brings integration within herself.

JIAN : You know, the first year we moved to America, our friend Henry introduced us to an American church. The first time we went, we were really nervous, didn't understand anything. After the service, we walked past the piano and Billi stood in front of it, staring. She reached her hand out and Haiyan stopped her. The pastor came over to introduce herself. Haiyan explained to the pastor that Billi used to study piano in China. She stopped after we moved and really missed it. We couldn't afford it. The pastor didn't say anything, but came back moments later and handed me a key. She said, "This key opens every door on this property. Come anytime and Billi can play the piano."

NAI NAI: Really? They really did that?

(Wang, p. 47)

Jian's cultural integration is demonstrated during a dinner with the extended Chinese family, where Jian recounts her experiences in America. She says that in the first year of moving to America, she and her family join a church and become part of the church. When sharing the

story with her extended family, Jian also complies with the family's decision to hide Nai Nai's disease, so when sharing a story, she does not show the slightest expression of sadness at Nai Nai. This shows that Jian experiences cultural integration, where she becomes part of the overseas community but also still brings the culture of her homeland when it is needed. This is in accordance with what Berry says, "Integration can be recognized when an individual simultaneously maintains their cultural heritage while developing a relationship with the host society." (Berry, as quoted in Krsmanovic, 2020, p. 957). Thus, this study shows that integration and assimilation can occur within the single family, depending on the extent of cultural exposure, in contrast to previous studies that concentrated on the preference that culture is usually passed on to offspring (Galli & Russo, 2018).

Assimilation of Billi

"Assimilation takes place when individuals do not maintain their cultural identity but successfully develop relationships with the dominant culture" (Berry, as quoted in Krsmanovic, 2020, p. 957). The Farewell, which is a movie that depicts cultural adaptation, shows not only cultural integration but also cultural assimilation. Cultural assimilation is experienced by Billi, a second-generation diaspora, who moved to America following her parents when she was seven years old. Therefore, she grew up with more exposure to American culture than the culture of her homeland. When Billi returns to China after a long stay in America to attend her cousin's wedding, she feels sad because the main reason for her return is the condition of her Nai Nai, who is suffering from cancer. Billi's cultural assimilation is felt when her logic and way of life conflict with the Confucian culture in China that her extended family adheres to.

Compared to Chinese culture, "In most Western nations, including the United States, disclosing the truth of a cancer diagnosis to a patient is the right action to take regardless of the prognosis" (Ngo, 2023, p. 36). This shows that in America, it is normal to disclose dangerous diseases such as cancer to patients.

1. Billi's Assimilation

"Assimilation takes place when individuals do not maintain their cultural identity but successfully develop relationships with the dominant culture" (Berry, as quoted in Krsmanovic, 2020, p. 957). The quotation below presents data that proves Billi as one of the main characters experiences the cultural integration. The data displayed here is the result of selection to show how Billi's character brings integration within himself.

BILLI	: Don't you think you should tell her?
DOCTOR SONG	: It's complicated. In her situation, most families in China wouldn't tell her. When my grandmother had cancer, my family also didn't tell her.
BILLI	: Don't you think it's wrong to lie?
DOCTOR SONG	: It's not really a lie if it's meant for good.
BILLI	: It's still a lie.

DOCTOR SONG : It's a good lie.

Billi doesn't understand the idea of his good lie. Good for what?

(Wang, p. 55)

Cultural assimilation is shown when Billi tries to find a voice to tell the truth to Nai Nai by talking to the doctor who treats Nai Nai. She reveals that Doctor Song should have told Nai Nai about Nai Nai's disease. However, Doctor Song's answer disappoints Billi, and even finding a voice to tell the truth through the doctor is unsuccessful. Billi does this because in America doctors revealing cancer diagnoses to their patients is normal things. In line with what Ngo says, "In most Western nations, including the United States, disclosing the truth of a cancer diagnosis to a patient is the right action to take regardless of the prognosis" (Ngo, 2023, p. 36). This shows that Billi is experiencing cultural assimilation, as Berry says, "Assimilation takes place when individuals do not maintain their cultural identity but successfully develop relationships with the dominant culture" (Berry, as quoted in Krsmanovic, 2020, p. 957). Thus, these findings indicate that first-generation diaspora and second-generation diaspora may experience the impact of the diaspora experience differently. Unlike previous studies that focuses on integration occurring gradually over generations (Waters & Pineau, 2016), this study reveals that assimilation and integration can occur within the single family, this could be due to the acceptance of different levels of cultural exposure.

CONCLUSION

Related to the Diaspora in this study, the existence of Diaspora experiences has an impact on diaspora identity. When they live in a new country, they will be exposed to new values from society, which can affect their identity. In the case of The Farewell movie, the characters experience different cultural adoptions; the first-generation experience cultural integration and the second-generation experience cultural assimilation. This is revealed when the wang family returns to China after a long time in America. Haiyan and Jian, the first generation of diaspora, experience cultural integration, where they become part of the host society but still adhere to the Confucian traditions of their homeland. While Billi, who grew up in America and is the second generation of diaspora, experiences cultural assimilation, where she melts into the values of American life and contradicts Chinese Confucian values. Therefore, it is revealed that the diaspora experience has a different impact on each character that experiences it.

This study contributes to migration studies by illustrating generational differences in cultural adaptation through movie analysis. A limitation of this study is its reliance on a single movie, which may not fully capture the broader diaspora experience. Future research could explore multiple movies to compare representations of cultural adaptation in different narratives and contexts.

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