



## **Film Review: "The Pig, The Snake and The Pigeon" (2023): An Analysis of Chen Guilin's Identity Based on the Communication Theory of Identity**

*(Ulasan Filem: "The Pig, The Snake and The Pigeon" (2023): Analisis Identiti Chen Guilin Berdasarkan Teori Komunikasi Identiti)*

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### *ABSTRACT*

*In the 2024 Taiwanese film "The Pig, The Snake, and The Pigeon" (Chinese title: "Zhou Chu Gets Rid of the Three Evils"), the story follows Chen Guilin, a charismatic gang member, who abandons his life of crime to become a celebrated hero in Chinese culture. The film depicts Chen Guilin's complex identity layers and his transformation from a despised gang member to a revered figure of chivalry. The Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) posits that communication is identity and identity is communication, highlighting four identity layers: personal, relational, enacted, and communal. Inconsistencies, tensions, and conflicts within these layers are identified as identity gaps and sources of dynamic identity change. This paper will apply the CTI framework to analyze the character of Chen Guilin. Research shows that the existence and dynamic changes in identity gaps are closely linked to the cultural environment in which the character resides. This study emphasizes the cultural conditions influencing the dynamic nature of identity gaps within the context of Chinese culture, demonstrating both the general applicability and unique characteristics of CTI in such an environment. Distinct aspects of Chinese culture fundamentally shape the presence and disappearance of Chen Guilin's identity gap.*

*Keywords: Identity gap; communication theory of identity; chivalrous values*



## ABSTRAK

Dalam filem Taiwan 2024 "The Pig, The Snake, and The Pigeon" (tajuk Cina: "Zhou Chu Gets Rid of the Three Evils"), kisah ini mengikuti Chen Guilin, seorang ahli kumpulan yang berkarisma, yang meninggalkan kehidupan jenayahnya untuk menjadi seorang wira yang diraikan dalam budaya Cina. Filem ini menggambarkan lapisan identiti Chen Guilin yang kompleks serta transformasinya daripada ahli kumpulan yang dibenci kepada tokoh kesatria yang dihormati. Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) menegaskan bahawa komunikasi adalah identiti dan identiti adalah komunikasi, dengan menekankan empat lapisan identiti: peribadi, hubungan, pelaksanaan, dan komuniti. Ketidakkonsistenan, ketegangan, dan konflik dalam lapisan ini dikenal pasti sebagai jurang identiti dan sumber perubahan identiti yang dinamik. Kertas ini akan menggunakan kerangka CTI untuk menganalisis watak Chen Guilin. Penyelidikan menunjukkan bahawa kewujudan dan perubahan dinamik dalam jurang identiti berkait rapat dengan persekitaran budaya di mana watak tersebut berada. Kajian ini menekankan syarat-syarat budaya yang mempengaruhi sifat dinamik jurang identiti dalam konteks budaya Cina, sekali gus menunjukkan kedua-dua kebolehgunaan umum dan ciri unik CTI dalam persekitaran sedemikian. Aspek-aspek khusus budaya Cina secara asasnya membentuk kewujudan dan lenyapnya jurang identiti Chen Guilin.

*Kata kunci:* Jurang identiti; teori komunikasi identiti; nilai kesatria

## INTRODUCTION

*The Pig, The Snake, and The Pigeon* (Chinese title: "Zhou Chu Gets Rid of the Three Evils") is the first Taiwanese film directed by Hong Kong filmmaker Wong Ching-po. It premiered in Taiwan in October 2023 and in mainland China in March 2024, quickly becoming the box office champion of the month. The film sparked widespread discussion among mainland Chinese netizens about the protagonist, Chen Guilin, who garnered much admiration and inspired numerous fan creations on social media. The film draws on the classical Chinese story "Zhou Chu Eliminates the Three Scourges" from "Shishuo Xinyu" [The story "Zhou Chu Eliminates the Three Scourges" from "Shishuo Xinyu" is about Zhou Chu, a notorious troublemaker, who decides to redeem himself. His village considers him one of three scourges: a tiger and a dragon. Determined to prove his worth, Zhou Chu kills the tiger and dragon.



Expecting gratitude, he is confronted with the villagers' lingering disdain for his past behavior. Realizing the harm he caused, Zhou Chu is deeply ashamed and resolves to reform. He leaves to seek guidance, ultimately transforming into a respected and virtuous individual]; the film uses Zhou Chu as an intertextual figure in its portrayal of Chen Guilin; by metaphorically aligning Zhou Chu's redemption and justice with Chen Guilin's transformation, the film creates a reflective commentary. Zhou Chu serves as Chen Guilin's spiritual goal, while Chen Guilin adds a new dimension of "outlaw spirit" to the traditional image of Zhou Chu.

The film follows Chen Guilin, a gang member driven by the desire for fame. Believing he is facing imminent death due to terminal lung cancer. With the passing of his only close relative, his grandmother—who had previously restrained him from committing more severe crimes—he undergoes a profound internal transformation. He decides to emulate Zhou Chu by eliminating two major criminals above him on the wanted list, aiming to achieve fame through this act. The film portrays Chen Guilin's multi-layered identity transformation from a notorious outlaw to an unconventional chivalric hero. His character embodies both the negative traits of a violent criminal and the positive traits of a dutiful grandson, brave subordinate, heroic savior, and righteous avenger. This portrayal of Chen Guilin as a flawed yet relatable character, rather than a perfect saint, resonates with the audience, evoking empathy and admiration. The turning point in Chen Guilin's identity transformation is triggered by a combination of personal (diagnosis of terminal lung cancer) and external (death of his only relative, his grandmother) factors, leading to a shift in his identity conflicts. This paper will apply the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) to analyze Chen Guilin's character, examining his different identity layers, the gaps between these layers, and the reasons for his identity changes. This analysis aims to provide a detailed understanding of Chen Guilin, a dynamic and charismatic film character, while offering a concrete case study for applying CTI theory. Additionally, it serves as a guide for future theoretical practice.

#### COMMUNICATION THEORY OF IDENTITY

The scope of applying the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) is broad. For example, it is primarily used in studies on cross-cultural adaptation (Murray & Kennedy-Lightsey, 2013; Orbe, 2004; Wadsworth, Hecht, & Jung, 2007), public health (Hecht & Choi, 2012; Upshaw, 2021; Stanley & Pitts, 2019; Colby et al., 2013; Palmer- Wackerly et al., 2018; Paige et al., 2019; Weaver et al., 2021), Romantic and Partner Relationships (Crowley & Miller 2020; Eckstein, 2019; Paxman, 2021; Burns & Peters, 2024), and LGBTQ+ identity (Rodriguez, 2019; Wagner et al., 2016; Nuru 2014; Whitestone, S. B., 2022). CTI is also found in analyses of film



and television works (Hecht et al., 2002; Seroka, 2020; Hayes& Watson, 2023). CTI helps to uncover the multilayered nature of identity and the differences, negotiations, and consistencies among the continually evolving identity characteristics.

The personal layer of identity refers to an individual's answer to the question, "Who am I?" This layer encompasses the meanings of self-subjective attributes and those ascribed by others. Personal identity, also known as self-concept, self-image, or self-esteem, provides an understanding of how individuals define themselves (Hecht, 1993). This layer constitutes a self-concept and is a "source of expectations and motivations" (Hecht, 1993). The enacted identity layer is expressed through communication in social interactions, defined as those messages conveyed through behavior and communication (Hecht, 1993). Relational identity is conceptualized by relationship roles (Hecht, 1993; Jung & Hecht, 2004). The relational identity layer involves identities manifesting through 1) internalizing identities through social interaction ascribed by others, 2) defining the self through relationships, 3) the relationship between identities, and 4) the relationship with another (Jung & Hecht, 2004). The communal layer of identity reflects group memberships and broader societal definitions, encompassing collectivities of identities (Hecht et al., 2005; Hecht & Phillips, 2022).

CTI adopts a dialectic or paradoxical view of layers, conceptualizing them as both changing and stable, as well as both subjective and ascribed. CTI emphasizes that we have multilayered identities and that these layers are interpenetrative. When an individual's identity layers are inconsistent or in conflict, tension between layers can result in an "identity gap." Hecht (2004) identified 11 types of identity gaps that can form between each identity layer in the CTI framework. This paper will specifically focus on personal-personal identity gaps, personal-relational identity gaps, and personal-communal identity gaps. Using CTI as a framework, one can analyze how film characters navigate identity gaps, providing insights into the complexities of identity representation and negotiation in cinematic narratives.

## FULFILMENT OF CHIVALROUS VALUES

The chivalrous values in this paper refer to a modern interpretation of the traditional Chinese martial spirit. The director uses the figures of "Guan Yu" (关羽) and "Zhou Chu" to concretize the concept of "Xia" (chivalry), which is rich in Chinese cultural and historical significance. While drawing from the Confucian values represented by Guan Yu and Zhou Chu, the film offers a new interpretation of chivalry. In traditional Chinese culture, Guan Yu is the "God of War," symbolizing loyalty and courage. On the other hand, Zhou Chu is a typical example of



repentance, transforming from a local bully into a beneficent official. Both are moral exemplars of traditional Confucian official culture.

In contrast, traditional Chinese chivalric culture represents a form of nomadic culture. Nomads lived outside the ancestral network of ancient Chinese society, detached from the established order. The spirit of chivalry, unlike the elite, official ethical standards represented by Confucianism, embodies secular, grassroots values. The morality adhered to by wandering knights often operates independently of state laws, forming what can be termed "private justice." These knights, guided by their private sense of justice, frequently transgress state laws and regulations. Since the 1980s, Hong Kong and Taiwanese gangster films have cleverly transplanted the spirit of chivalry into the imaginative depiction of gangster life, often portraying it as a counter to the established order. This chivalric spirit and code of conduct are similar to the values and actions depicted in Francis Ford Coppola's film *The Godfather* (1972). For example, Don Corleone helps an Italian funeral parlor owner punish the thugs who sexually assaulted his daughter, taking justice into his own hands due to the court's lenient treatment of the culprits.

The spirit of chivalry represents a complex recognition and rebellion against simple folk morality and official legal ethics. It forms an alternative value system that complements the deficiencies of the official value system. Chivalry plays a role in constructing the value system of the Chinese people alongside official ethics. Therefore, the sense of fulfillment in chivalry refers to an individual's assessment of how well they can embody and achieve the spirit of chivalry, becoming a "great hero."

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Through the following conceptual framework (see Figure 1), the researcher employs the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) to illustrate the identity changes experienced by the film's protagonist, Chen Guilin. The framework aims to explain how Chen Guilin's existing identity gaps evolve under the impact of sudden events and how he ultimately manages these identity gaps to fulfill his chivalric values.

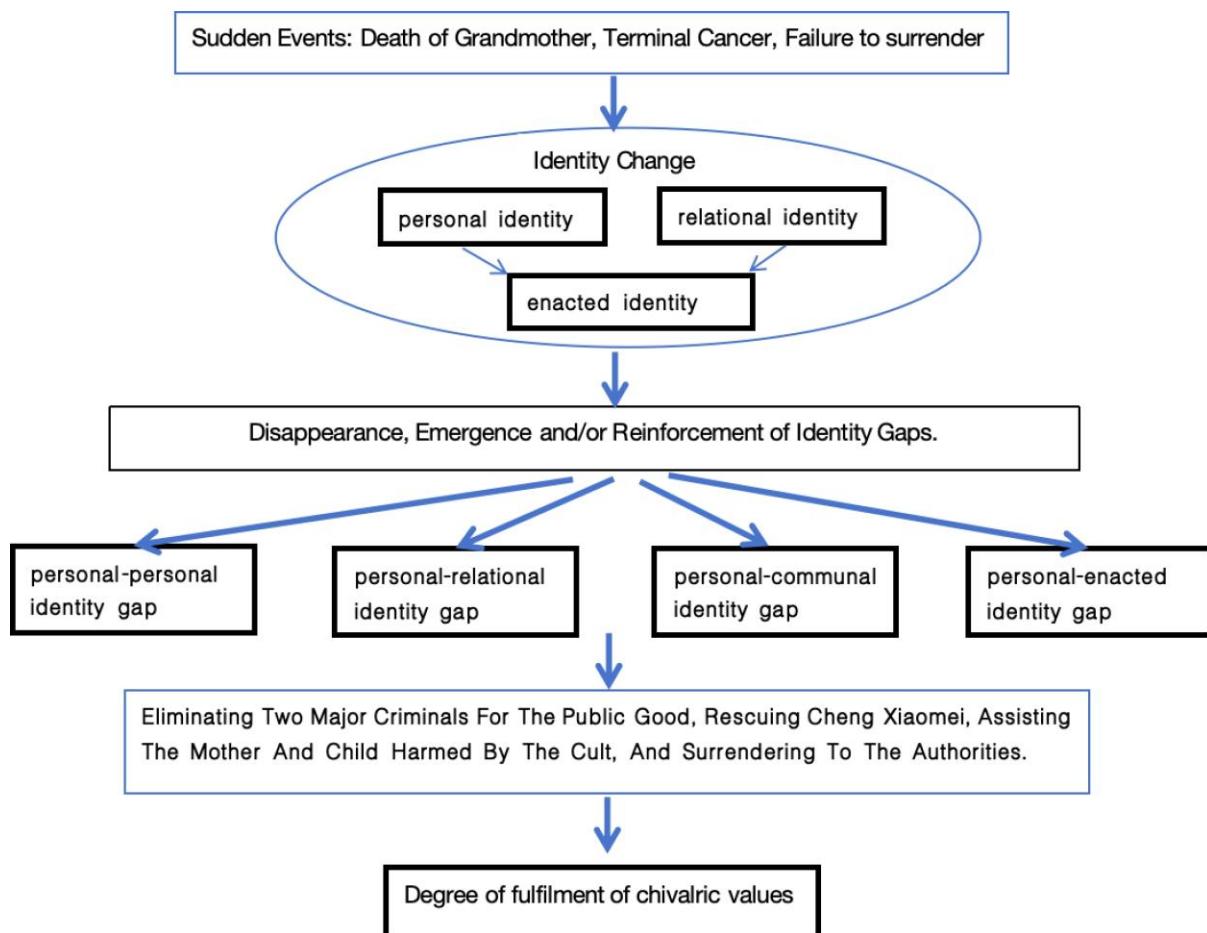


FIGURE 1. Conceptual framework

The researcher conducted all the observations from the main character in the film, collected the data, and analyzed the data using the CTI, which has been explained. This research used the film *The Pig, The Snake, and The Pigeon* and the dialogue script of that film as the source of data, and the data were the dialogues and expressions related to the film's main character. Of course, we do not reject "the paramount importance of non-verbal elements" such as "gestures, gaze, facial expression, head movements, and body posture"; they "can either contribute to expressing meaning along with the speech or can convey meaning per se" (Bonsignori, 2016).



## METHODOLOGY

As scholars studying ethnic identity and communication, we analyzed Chen Guilin's identity. The first author is a Chinese female scholar familiar with Chinese culture and genre films, while the second author is a male scholar proficient in identity studies and the Chinese language. Initially, both authors individually watched the mainland China release of *The Pig, The Snake, and The Pigeon*, which has a runtime of 134 minutes. They allowed themselves to immerse in the film's details, aiming to get a sense of the film before breaking it down into separate parts. This approach helped them comprehensively understand the storyline and character development. After the first viewing, both authors re-watched the film. They recorded key moments related to the development of Chen Guilin's identity, its various layers, identity gaps, and identity negotiation on an "Observation Log." In total, eight scenes were transcribed and selected for textual analysis. The transcripts were analyzed using a phonetic iterative coding approach (Tracy, 2020) guided by the CTI layers of identity.

First, researchers began with an initial coding round, identifying and labelling every scene and dialogue related to identity. For example, in the opening scene, where different gang factions attend Hong Ye's memorial service, the subordinate in charge registers the identity of each mourner. It distributes a cash gift (appreciation money) ranging from 300 to 500 NT dollars, depending on the mourner's social status. In Chinese culture, individuals of higher status receive more appreciation for money. Because Chen Guilin receives 300 NT dollars in this scene, he is marked as having "low identity status," and the related dialogue providing identity information is also recorded. Following the initial coding, the researcher conducted categorization and theme development, grouping similar codes to form broader categories or themes. This process involves synthesizing the data into more abstract concepts. During this phase, axial coding explored the relationships between codes and categories, refining the conceptual framework.

According to the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), axial coding includes personal, enacted, relational, and communal identities. As a result, the aforementioned mourning scene was further categorized under communal identity in the axial coding process. Subsequently, an in-depth analysis was carried out, where the researchers examined the preliminary themes more closely, exploring their relationships and logical connections. During this stage, it was observed that a gap existed between Chen Guilin's lower communal identity and his ambition to "make a big move so that everyone knows me." The researchers then linked the mourning scene to Chen Guilin's personal aspirations, associating communal and personal identity themes. After completing the in-depth analysis, the researchers proceeded with an ongoing iteration,



repeatedly watching the film and returning to the raw data to assess whether the coding system needed modification, themes required reclassification, or new data should be added. For instance, the researchers identified previously overlooked data during multiple viewings, such as the scene where Chen Guilin returns after four years on the run. Despite his return, only one old comrade, Jinmao, is present to assist him, which contrasts with traditional Chinese cultural expectations, where relatives and friends would celebrate or followers would eagerly serve. Chen is left alone. This scene was coded and categorized under relational identity. Since no explicit dialogue conveys Chen's desolation, the audience must infer his emotional state based on their own Chinese cultural understanding, making this data easy to overlook. The researcher added this new observation during the Ongoing Iteration phase. Finally, after multiple iterative processes, the researcher integrated the refined themes into a coherent CTI analytical framework.

Once the first draft was completed, the researchers re-watched the film together, employing the constant comparison method (Baxter & Babbie, 2004) to ensure that no important scenes were overlooked and that the coding was reasonable and consistent. Following this, we examined how to utilize the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) further to reveal the complex layers of Chen Guilin's identity, his identity gaps, and the negotiations surrounding his identity transformation based on our final records. During this process, the authors also engaged in memo writing to self-reflect. This memo writing served as both an individual and collaborative activity. Independently written memos allowed the authors to reflect on how their unique perspectives, biases, or preferences—such as those related to gender—may have influenced the accuracy of their data recording. When working together, the authors could discuss the rational development of the storyline and turning points in the characters' identities while sharing their initial emotional responses to the film. Additionally, the authors could challenge each other's reflections and interpretations of the data, ensuring mutual accountability throughout the process.

## RESULTS

### INITIAL IDENTITY GAP

Chen Guilin's initial identity gaps are primarily reflected in the relational, enacted, and communal layers. The film opens with a minor gang member, Jin Mao, sharing a recent significant event within the gang: Chen Guilin helped their leader, Ren Yinjiu (Brother Jiu), collect a debt by killing Hong Ye(grandfather), who owed gambling money, with a grenade.



Unbeknownst to Jin Mao, the seemingly gentle man sitting next to him is Chen Guolin himself. This indicates that Chen Guolin has just started to gain notoriety within the gang; he has some fame, but people do not yet recognize him personally. Chen Guolin is dissatisfied with his current level of recognition, as evidenced by his conversation with Jin Mao.

Jin Mao: Hong Ye (grandfather) made a splash; that lunatic came from Taipei to take him out."

Chen Guolin: Who are you talking about?

Jin Mao: Guolin son."

Chen Guolin: What do you mean 'Guolin' son? Chen Guolin is unhappy with how Jin Mao refers to him.

Jin Mao: Although I think he's a madman, he's pretty formidable."

Chen Guolin: Do you know him? Here, Chen Guolin smiles, feeling satisfied as Jin Mao talks about him with admiration.

Chen Guolin is very sensitive about how others refer to him. In the hierarchy of the underworld, titles range from "Grandfather" (the highest rank), "Brother" to "Son" (the lowest rank). In Chinese culture, being called "son" signifies the lowest position, which frustrates Chen Guolin. Regarding gangster rank, Jin Mao and Chen Guolin still belong to the same level of "son." In reality, Jin Mao treats Chen Guolin as an ordinary gang member, even casually inviting him to return to Taipei. Jin Mao perceives their relationship as equal, indicating that Chen Guolin has not yet distinguished himself significantly. However, Chen Guolin is unsatisfied with this status quo of being a nobody and is very concerned about becoming famous. Therefore, after his brief conversation with Jin Mao, Chen Guolin asserts, "My name is Chen Guolin. I have a proper name. Stop calling me 'son'." He then wipes his hands on Jin Mao's shirt, symbolizing his disdain for the term and asserting his desire for respect. This action also establishes a hierarchical relationship between him and Jin Mao, highlighting the personal-relational and personal-communal identity gaps. Chen Guolin desires Jin Mao's respect and wants to establish a notable reputation in the underworld. During this period, Chen Guolin also experiences a personal-enacted identity gap. His grandmother, his only family member, plays a significant role. He kept a relatively low profile because he feared that news of his criminal activities would reach his grandmother in the nursing home and distress her. This is evident from his comments after her death. Upon returning to Taipei four years after committing his crimes, Chen Guolin tells the underworld doctor Chen Guiqing, "I was worried. I feared making the news, and my grandmother would see it and be very upset. Now that she is gone, I want to pull off something big so that everyone in the underworld knows who I am." His grandmother's



death removed this constraint, indicating that Chen Guilin did not fully enact his true self while she was alive.

Chen Guilin's personal-communal identity gap is evident in his desire to become famous within the underworld community. He is very dissatisfied with his obscure status upon returning to Taipei. When the underworld doctor Chen Guiqing informs him that he has terminal lung cancer and advises him to surrender to the police, he is initially shocked but soon accepts his fate. After returning home, Chen Guilin uses traditional Chinese divination to consult Guan Yu, the god of war, on whether he should surrender. This ritual is commonly practiced by Chinese people, in which believers toss two crescent-shaped wooden or bamboo pieces, called *杯爻* (bei jiao), to seek guidance from gods or ancestors. The response is interpreted based on how the "bei jiao" land. This form of divination remains popular in China today, particularly in southern regions. For example, a person from Southeast China may use "bei jiao" to ask Mazu, the goddess of the sea, for her blessing before embarking on a business venture overseas. If Mazu approves, they will proceed; otherwise, they will likely cancel the trip. Despite modern advancements, this divination ritual continues to play a role in the daily lives of many Chinese people. In the film, Chen Guilin similarly seeks the advice of Guan Yu and ultimately receives nine "sacred cups," symbolizing Guan Yu's strong approval of his decision and encouraging him to abandon his wrongdoings and choose a righteous path. Chen Guilin decides to follow this divine guidance and surrender. When Chen Guilin arrives at the police station to surrender, he finds it crowded with people returning money they had picked up from a wrecked banknote truck. Amid the chaos, the police do not recognize him.

Police officer: Sir, please don't block the entrance. Sir?

Chen Guilin: I'm Chen Guilin.

Police officer: Mr. Chen, please prepare your ID and queue there if you want to surrender.

As he speaks, an older adult bumps into Chen Guilin.

Elderly man: I'm here to surrender.

Police officer: Who here isn't here to surrender? Follow the rules and queue up over there.

Chen Guilin is then directed to join a group of elderly people, where an elderly man pushes and admonishes him.

Elderly man: Don't be so aggressive. We're all in a hurry, so queue up quickly.



Chen Guilin thought surrendering for his serious crimes would be significant, but he is treated the same as those surrendering lost money. This stark contrast between his expectations and reality shocks him. At the police station, he sees his "Most Wanted" poster buried among other notices, revealing that he is only the third most wanted criminal. Before surrendering, Chen Guilin believed that his crimes—killing the gangster Hong Ye (The highest rank of 'Grandfather') with a grenade, shooting the gang's second-in-command Iron Head(As the second rank of 'Brother'), and attacking police—had made him a notorious and feared figure. However, the absurd reality shows him that he is still a "nobody," far from the infamous criminal he imagined himself to be. This realization drives him to change something.

Overall, this stage of Chen Guilin's life, marked by his grandmother's death, his cancer diagnosis, the results of his divination, and his unnoticed surrender at the police station, leads to significant changes in his identity. These events result in the emergence, disappearance, and/or reinforcement of various identity gaps.

#### CHANGE OF IDENTITY

Chen Guilin's identity undergoes significant changes in the dimensions of personal, relational, and enacted identity. In terms of individual identity, regarding his "self-concept," Chen Guilin perceives himself as having transformed from a robust man to a terminal lung cancer patient nearing the end of his life. Regarding his "self-esteem," after fleeing back to Taiwan, he realizes that the public has forgotten him. Even among his followers, there's still only one little brother around, starkly different from his expectation of being a notorious figure. He realizes that he lacks even the infamy he once thought he had. On the level of relational identity, the death of his grandmother makes Chen Guilin an orphan, leaving no one in the world for him to care about, and all his constraints disappear. Since the layers of identity in the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) are interrelated and permeable, it can be inferred that the changes in Chen Guilin's personal and relational identity directly lead to changes in his enacted identity. With his life nearing its end and feeling he has achieved nothing, he no longer fears appearing in the news as a criminal. This means he will act even more out of the ordinary to "earn a heroic reputation." These changes in his enacted identity are determined by the disappearing, newly generated, and strengthened identity gaps, which collectively influence his practical behavior. (see Table 1)



TABLE 1. Disappearance, Emergence and/or Reinforcement of Identity Gaps

Disappearance: personal-enacted identity gap	Bound by grandma to keep a relatively low profile	gap	Can act as he wish without constraints
Emergence : personal-personal identity gap	Redeeming the Feminine	gap	Redeemed by the Feminine
Reinforcement : personal-relational identity gap	The nameless gangster "Son".	gap	"Big Brother", respected by the gangsters.
Reinforcement : personal-communal identity gap	Offenders against the social order	gap	A righteous chivalrous warrior who fights for the people.

Driven by the tension generated by these identity gaps, Chen Guilin embarks on a series of actions to enhance his fulfillment of chivalric values. After being ignored by the police during his initial attempt to surrender, Chen Guilin decides to emulate Zhou Chu. His aim is twofold: to rid society of its evils and earn a reputable name for himself. He tells the female gangster doctor, Chen Guiqing, "After deciding to surrender, I realized I am not valuable enough." At this point, his desire shifts from merely wanting to "do something big" (regardless of its nature) to explicitly "eliminating evil for the people," indicating his rejection of his identity as a gangster and his embrace of the idealized figure of Zhou Chu.

He first tracks down the second most wanted criminal, Xu Weiqiang (Hong Kong Zai), and kills him in a barn, also shooting three of Xu's henchmen who aided in his crimes. He rescues Cheng Xiaomei, Xu's stepdaughter, who Xu had sexually assaulted for years. When Cheng offers herself to him, Chen Guilin grants her freedom, showing no interest in exploiting her vulnerability. While confronting the top wanted criminal, Lin Luhe, he single-handedly fights Lin Lu and his fanatical followers, rescuing a single mother and her child from their clutches. Realizing that Lin Lu's cult has thoroughly brainwashed its members, leading them to harm innocent people, Chen Guilin massacres the cult members. Finally, Chen Guilin boards a ship back to Taipei, gently taking a girl hostage to facilitate his surrender. After being handcuffed by the police, he walks towards the police car with a smile, proudly raising his handcuffed hands and shouting to the media, "My name is Chen Guilin, Chen—Gu—Lin." Following these two significant killings, Chen Guilin receives extensive media coverage. The first media report appears after he kills Xu Weiqiang (Hong Kong Zai). He asked Cheng Xiaomei to emphasize to the police that "Chen Guilin killed Hong Kong Zai" and that he had committed the murder. This ensures that his name gets significant media exposure. The second media report follows his surrender, with news outlets highlighting his latest actions. Media



representations can influence how we construct our identities and interact with others (Gündüz, 2017; Riles et al., 2020). Through these media reports, Chen Guilin's actions in eliminating two major criminals and numerous cult members are broadcast to the public, portraying him as a heroic figure who eradicates evil. This narrows his personal-communal identity gaps, and the societal recognition of his new identity also transforms his relational identity. Within the underworld, Chen Guilin's shocking actions elevate his status from "junior" (son) to "brother," earning him respect from gang members. He also gains the admiration of Cheng Xiaomei and the respect of the police, further narrowing his personal-relational identity gaps. By successfully reducing his personal-communal and personal-relational identity gaps, Chen Guilin ultimately achieves his personal-personal identity gap, becoming the idealized version of himself—akin to Zhou Chu. Thus, when faced with a death sentence from the judicial system, he peacefully accepts his fate.

In addition, the film presents a more subtle feminist perspective on Chen Guilin's personal identity gap, which can be easily overlooked due to his acceptance of this gap. In his relationships with women, Chen Guilin appears as a savior. Like many Hong Kong gangster films, women in this movie symbolize goodness and virtue; they are portrayed as weak and in need of male protection, often submissive and without their agency, essentially "voiceless" in the narrative. For example, the female lead, Cheng Xiaomei, has been sexually assaulted for years by the second villain, Xu Weiqiang (Hong Kong Zai), and awaits her "prince" to rescue her. As in many stereotypical Hong Kong and Taiwanese gangster films, Chen Guilin saves Cheng Xiaomei, fulfilling the chivalric trope of the hero, saving the damsel in distress. This act underscores his masculinity and reinforces his perceived superiority over women within his identity. However, the film challenges this dynamic in Chen Guilin's interactions with the female gangster doctor, Chen Guiqing, where a more complex power struggle emerges. In these scenes, Chen Guilin consistently adopts a coercive and domineering approach. When Chen Guiqing refuses to reveal the whereabouts of the two other wanted criminals, Lin Luhe and Xu Weiqiang, Chen Guilin kidnaps Chen Guiqing's son as leverage. Yet, towards the end of the film, a crucial truth is unveiled: it is Chen Guiqing who deceived Chen Guilin about his cancer diagnosis. In reality, the female gangster doctor, Chen Guiqing, who is terminally ill with cancer, orchestrated this ruse to compel Chen Guilin to surrender and reform. Therefore, Chen Guilin's actions of eliminating the two major criminals and voluntarily surrendering were not of his own volition but were triggered by the female gangster doctor, Chen Guiqing. This twist subverts the typical subordinate role of women in gangster films, as Chen Guiqing ultimately determines the course of Chen Guilin's life. When Chen Guilin learns the truth during a visit with Chen Guiqing in prison, he calmly accepts the outcome, recognizing that Chen Guiqing orchestrated his surrender. For the penetration of personal identity, Chen Guilin believes that,



as a criminal, he should reform just like Zhou Chu, and Chen Guiqing helped him achieve this. Chen Guilin undergoes a moral redemption and transformation, evolving from "Chen Guilin" to a figure reminiscent of Zhou Chu. At this point, his identity shifts from a dominant masculine stance to one of gender equality, acknowledging the crucial role of the female doctor in his transformation.

## DISCUSSION

This study analyzes key scenes, events, dialogues, and character actions in *The Pig, The Snake, and The Pigeon*, utilizing the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) to interpret the multiple identity layers of the protagonist, Chen Guilin. Through this framework, the study highlights how conflicts arise from the gaps between these identity layers, influencing the character's behavior. By applying this theory, the research offers a nuanced examination of the protagonist's identity and provides a detailed explanation of how these identity gaps are formed. This approach facilitates a deeper understanding of the underlying motivations driving the protagonist's actions. While previous research has employed CTI to analyze identity negotiation in film, this study is the first to apply the theory within Chinese culture, addressing a significant gap in the literature. The findings highlight several critical factors in identity negotiation specific to the Chinese cultural context, including traditional Confucian filial piety, folk beliefs, and unique cultural values such as the concept of chivalry. The study reveals that while CTI is an effective tool for analyzing identity negotiation in Chinese films, the importance of different identity layers varies across cultural contexts. For instance, in Chinese culture, Chen Guilin's adherence to his relational identity as a dutiful grandson constrains the expression of his enacted and personal identities.

The study demonstrates that filial piety elevates relational identity above other layers of identity, such as the enacted and personal ones. Given that Chinese society is often described as a "relational society" or a "society of human connections," special attention must be paid to the prominence of relational identity when applying CTI to analyzing identity negotiation in Chinese contexts. This culturally sensitive analysis validates the applicability of CTI in a Chinese context and enhances our understanding of the identity negotiation process. The research underscores the pivotal role that identity gaps play in shaping character behavior and motivations, emphasizing the significance of relational identity in Chinese culture. By introducing this cultural perspective, the study advances a more complex and refined understanding of identity negotiation and contributes to the broader cross-cultural application of identity communication theory.

Furthermore, the findings have practical implications for filmmakers. By revealing how



identity gaps influence character development, directors and screenwriters can draw inspiration from this research to construct more nuanced character arcs. Specifically, the concept of identity negotiation could be used to shape "redemption" narratives, offering audiences positive examples of managing conflict and tension through communication. Thus, this research contributes to academic discourse and provides a fresh perspective that could inspire innovation in film storytelling, particularly in identity expression and negotiation.

Like most studies, this research has limitations. We could only analyze the textual content presented on screen, such as sound, visuals, and plot elements, without directly accessing the intentions of the screenwriter, director, or actors behind specific scenes. Consequently, our analysis is based solely on our text interpretation, which may deviate from the creators' original intent. This limitation may prevent us from fully capturing the intended nuances or, in some cases, may lead to misinterpretation.

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