Pixar's "Turning Red" isn't inappropriate…it's just Asian

How did a dorky, adorable and sometimes fluffy red panda become one of the most controversial topics in film of 2022?

Since its mid-February debut on Disney+, Domee Shi's new coming-of-age movie "Turning Red " has already faced an abundance of controversy. Negativity surrounding the film isn't just coming from professional critics, but also from the wrath of angry parents and disapproval from some religious leaders. Despite it being a Pixar movie, many viewers have found fault within the film's theme of puberty, labeling it to be "too adult" or "inappropriate" for children. Others worry that the movie portrays anti-Christian messages and encourages children to rebel against their parents.

But what makes "Turning Red" so divisive in comparison to other fan-favorite, coming-of-age films with a rebellious protagonist, such as Disney's "The Little Mermaid," "The Lion King" or Pixar's "Luca?"

Perhaps the underlying issue that many people have with "Turning Red" is not because of the film's themes of disobedience or even the fact it mentions women's menstruation, but because it incorporates Eastern-Asian culture and values.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the amount of anti-Asian discrimination and violence has significantly increased. It is reported that over 9,000 anti-Asian incidents have occurred since the pandemic began. According to the PEW Research Center, one-third of Asian Americans even fear racially motivated threats and physical attacks against them and have been subject to racial slurs or jokes since the pandemic.

Given the immense rise of violence and stigma around Asians and Asian-Americans, it is no surprise that Pixar's "Turning Red" has become one of the latest victims of anti-Asian sentiment.

of the movie by calling it limiting and "exhausting." He stated:

"Some Pixar Films are made for universal audiences. 'Turning Red' is not. The target audience for this one feels very specific and very narrow… I am not in it. This was exhausting."

Like this critic, there seems to be a collective misunderstanding of what the movie is actually about and what it represents. This boils down to the fact that Eastern-Asian culture is still considered to be "foreign" for many people. For example, the film contains scenes where the main character and her family are honoring and communicating with their ancestors using temples and sacred rituals. These scenes have already been attacked for being sac-religious or demonic by Christian reviewers. This is a deeply flawed Eurocentric view, as it overlooks the fact that these are very important cultural and spiritual practices to many countries in Eastern-Asia.

Asia itself is home to over a hundred different languages, many religions (eg, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism) and countless social norms. The United States and other Western countries have a long history of structural racism and prejudice against these Eastern religions, cultures and values.

As an Asian-American myself, I have had my fair share of racist encounters. Most of them stemmed from plain ignorance or unfamiliarity. Many Asian-Americans can probably relate to the experience of bringing their "Asian" lunch to school and being told that their food looks gross and smelly, simply because it wasn't a PB&J sandwich. To put it plainly, unfamiliarity can be scary, and when people are met with discomfort, they can become defensive or aggressive.

Pixar's "Turning Red" is no exception. The East vs. West mindset has ostracized Eastern culture from fair judgment in the Western world. For example, Pixar's other smash movie hits "Coco" and "Encanto" have both received an extreme amount of adornment and praise, despite both films featuring a rebellious protagonist and being of similar theme to "Turning Red," exemplifies the fact that Western culture is more accepting of cultures that are familiar to them. Think about how Cinco de Mayo is widely celebrated in Western countries outside of Mexico, yet Lunar New Year is not as

commonly renowned. And when people encounter unfamiliarity, they often are uncomfortable.

The problem people have with "Turning Red" isn't because of its characters and plot, but because it is Asian. So before jumping on the red panda hate-train, consider the messages that Domee Shi intended to convey. In her own words, Pixar's "Turning Red" is a movie that seeks to inspire its audiences to "take up space…be big and loud and hairy and messy and imperfect. And [recognize] that's beautiful too."

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