

REPRESENTATION OF CULTURAL HYBRIDITY IN THE ASIAN AMERICAN COMEDY FILM 'JOY RIDE' 2023

Fikriyah Syaniah¹, Indah Lestari²
Gunadarma University, Jakarta, Indonesia

fikriyahsyaniah13@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study examines cultural hybridity in the film *Joy Ride* (2023), which blends Western and Asian cultural elements. Understanding cultural hybridity is crucial in the era of globalization to foster mutual respect and avoid subjective negative perceptions of foreign cultures. This research aims to analyze the forms, processes, and purposes of cultural hybridity depicted in the film. A qualitative descriptive method was employed with a constructive paradigm, applying Ferdinand de Saussure's structural semiotics. The findings were further analyzed using Homi K. Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity, which includes hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence. The study identified 11 instances of hybrid culture reflected in the characters' daily lives. Mimicry is observed in four key aspects, such as Lolo's gesture of raising her middle finger in a photo, symbolizing an adaptation of Western norms. Additionally, the characters adopt K-Pop-inspired fashion to gain social acceptance. Audrey's professional success as a lawyer and Lolo's reputation as "most likely to get arrested" further highlight hybrid cultural identities. Ambivalence emerges in tensions between participation and discrimination, Western attitudes and traditional Chinese values, and stereotypical intercultural interactions. These findings illustrate how cultural hybridity manifests in *Joy Ride* (2023), highlighting the complexities of identity negotiation in a multicultural world.

Keywords— Hybrid Culture, Joy Ride, Movie, Representation, Structural Semiotics

Introduction

Globalization has significantly facilitated cultural exchange through advancements in technology, communication, and transportation, leading to the emergence of cultural hybridity (Hilal, Anantama, & Munaris, 2023; Zhao, Hoon, & Ching, 2020). This concept, rooted in postcolonial theory, describes how different cultural elements merge and adapt in contact zones influenced by colonial and global interactions (Salindri, Nugroho, & Nuryatin, 2022). Homi K. Bhabha expanded on this idea with the notion of the 'Third Space,' a dynamic environment where cultures interact and create hybrid forms (Furqon & Busro, 2020; Rizki & Hawasi, 2024). Within this space, processes such as mimicry—where minority cultures imitate dominant cultures and ambivalence, a psychological duality toward cultural influences shape identity formation.

Film serves as a powerful medium in representing cultural hybridity, reflecting national identity and shaping cross-cultural perceptions. This study focuses on *Joy Ride* (2023), directed by Adele Lim, which follows four Chinese-American protagonists navigating their cultural identities. The film illustrates the complexity of hybrid identity through Audrey's business trip to China, where cultural expectations in business negotiations emphasize familial connections. The proverb, "If you don't know where you come from, how can you know who you are?" highlights the tension between Western individualism and Asian collectivist values, reinforcing the film's engagement with cultural hybridity.

Existing research on Asian-American films has explored their blend of Western and

Asian cinematic elements, creating a distinct hybrid identity. However, there remains a gap in analyzing how Joy Ride specifically represents cultural hybridity through Bhabha's concepts of mimicry, ambivalence, and hybrid identity. This study addresses this gap by examining the film's portrayal of cross-cultural exchanges and their implications.

The research objectives are to analyze the forms, processes, and purposes of cultural hybridity in Joy Ride (2023). This includes identifying cultural elements that represent hybridity, exploring instances of mimicry, and understanding the motivations behind it. Additionally, this study investigates the presence of ambivalence in the film, shedding light on internal conflicts arising from cultural hybridity.

By applying Bhabha's framework, this study contributes to film and cultural studies, offering deeper insights into identity construction and intercultural interactions (Sultoni & Utomo, 2021). Practically, the findings provide a reference for filmmakers aiming to create culturally resonant narratives. Socially, this research fosters cross-cultural understanding, reducing stereotypes and promoting inclusivity. Through an analysis of Joy Ride, this study underscores the significance of cultural hybridity in contemporary cinema and its role in bridging cultural divides.

Literature Review

Film

Film is a type of literary work in the form of an audiovisual medium. Film is considered a type of literary work because all forms of film expression align with the characteristics of literary texts. In general, film is defined as a product of human civilization that emerges through a creative process of crafting dreams (imagination) using technology, with results that can be viewed by everyone. Film focuses on events around us, present events, past events, and dreams of the future whether they will happen or not that impact human civilization.

Film is a mass medium characterized by audiovisual elements, allowing it to reach a large audience. Meanwhile, Michael Ravigar defines film as something amusing and engaging, making its viewers think. The characteristics of film as a mass medium also enable it to shape a kind of visual public consensus since film is always connected to the values that exist in society and public preferences. In other words, film encapsulates the plurality of values within society.

Film can capture societal phenomena and changes, then present them back to the public for appreciation. As a communication medium, films contain various messages that their creators aim to convey. These messages are built from different signs found within the film.

Culture and Identity

Culture is a society's shared way of life, encompassing intellect, traditions, and habits. It is one of the most complex words in English, while KBBI traces it to the Sanskrit buddhaya (intellect/spirit). Jencks classifies culture into intellectual aspiration, elitist ranking, artistic works, and way of life, while Haralambos and Holborn identify five types: High, Folk, Mass, Popular, and Subculture.

Identity, shaped by nationality, ethnicity, gender, and class, operates at three levels: Passive (latent), Active (recognized), and Politicized (collective action). Postmodern theories see identity as fluid, shaped by social interactions, language, and traditions.

Homi K. Bhabha's cultural hybridity theory describes blending cultures in a "Third Space," where identities merge yet retain uniqueness. He highlights ambivalence, mimicry, and stereotypes as tools of both resistance and transformation (Ediani & Sajarwa, 2023). Stuart Hall's cultural representation theory outlines three meaning-making approaches: reflective (mirroring reality), intentional (shaped by creators), and constructivist (social/historical context). This study applies Saussure's semiotic analysis to explore hybridity in Joy Ride (2023) and its representation of cultural negotiation.

Semiotics by Ferdinand de Saussure

The term semiotics comes from the Greek word semeion, meaning "sign." It is the study of objects, events, and entire cultures as signs that communicate meaning. Semiotics is a

discipline that focuses on signs and the systems governing their use. A sign is anything that conveys meaning and is used for communication.

Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory is known as structural semiotics (AS & Umayya, 2022). Saussure divided signs into two components: the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the physical form of the sign, such as words, images, or sounds, while the signified is the concept or meaning associated with it. The process that links the signifier and the signified is called signification.

Research Method

A research paradigm guides the selection of methods and the evaluation of results, it provides a fundamental way of thinking and conducting research. This study adopts the constructivist paradigm, which views social reality as a product of social. Constructivist research explores how identities are shaped through language and shared experiences. This approach is used to analyze the cultural hybrid representation in *Joy Ride* (2023) by interpreting specific scenes and comparing them with relevant theories.

The research object is the film *Joy Ride*, an American comedy that explores identity through the characters' journey. Qualitative research is used to analyze social phenomena, with the researcher as the main instrument. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method to provide an in-depth analysis of the film's hybrid cultural identity representations.

Data collection is crucial for gathering relevant information. This study uses primary data, including original video recordings of *Joy Ride*, and secondary data from literature reviews, books, and academic articles. These sources help contextualize the film's representation of cultural hybridity.

Data analysis involves interpreting the film's elements—actions, characters, and dialogues—using Stuart Hall's representation theory. The process includes reviewing the film, conducting a literature review, systematically observing key scenes, and analyzing expressive processes in both mental and verbal aspects. Finally, the discussion and conclusion evaluate how the film represents hybrid cultural identity within the theoretical framework.

Results and Discussion

Joy Ride (2023) Film



Joy Ride is an American comedy film directed by Adele Lim. The film follows four Asian-American protagonists and Deadeye who embark on a journey filled with humor and self-discovery. The story revolves around Audrey, whose business trip to China takes an unexpected turn when her potential business partner refuses to sign a contract. He firmly believes in a Chinese proverb that emphasizes the importance of knowing one's origins before making life decisions. As a result, Audrey decides to search for her biological mother to prove her identity and secure the deal.

Accompanied by her three friends, Audrey travels to Haiching, where she was adopted, only to discover that her mother was originally from Korea. This revelation leads them to Korea, where Audrey learns more about her past and finds out that her biological mother has passed away. Throughout their journey, the group faces numerous challenges that test their friendship, identity, and personal growth. Despite conflicts and setbacks, their adventure ultimately strengthens their bond. The film concludes on a heartfelt note, celebrating the power of friendship and self-acceptance.

Material Cultural Hybridization Representation in Joy Ride (2023)

Data 1

Symbol	Dialogue	Visual (Image)
	-	
		Time: 00.03.42
	Signifier	Signified
	Lolo eats a snack (Cheetos) with chopsticks.	Cheetos is an American snack, and Lolo uses chopsticks, which are traditional eating utensils from China.

Lolo's use of chopsticks to eat Cheetos exemplifies material cultural hybridity by blending Asian and Western cultural elements. Chopsticks, deeply rooted in Chinese culture, symbolize traditions and etiquette, while Cheetos is a Western snack typically eaten by hand. By combining these elements, Lolo creates a unique cultural experience, demonstrating adaptability and cross-cultural integration. This scene highlights how material hybridity shapes new interactions with food and dining practices (Fajar, 2022). This material hybridity echoes cultural persistence and modern expression seen in diasporic identity (Sulistyo, Binangun, & Sartika, 2020).

Data 2

Symbol	Dialogue	Visual (Image)
	-	
		Time: 00:07:14
	Signifier	Signified
	A painting of lotus petals shaped like a vagina.	A fusion of the lotus flower, symbolizing fertility and beauty in Chinese culture, and the concept of sexual freedom in Western culture.

The painting of lotus petals resembling a vagina exemplifies material cultural hybridity by merging traditional Chinese symbolism with modern Western perspectives. In Chinese culture, the lotus represents purity and fertility, while in the West, the vagina symbolizes femininity and sexual freedom. This fusion creates a dialogue between tradition and modernity, showcasing how visual elements from different cultures interact to produce deeper meanings.

Data 3

Symbol	Dialogue	Visual (Image)
	-	
		Time: 01:24:43
	Signifier	Signified
	Lolo's sculpture of a cat sticking out its tongue is displayed in an American restaurant, Jasmine Garden.	The cat sculpture represents Chinese culture, while Jasmine Garden Restaurant is an American establishment.

The Maneki-Neko statue at Jasmine Garden Restaurant represents material cultural hybridity by blending Chinese traditions with a Western setting. While the statue symbolizes good fortune in Chinese culture, its presence in an American restaurant reflects cultural adaptation and globalization. This fusion integrates Chinese aesthetics into a Western environment, illustrating the dynamic evolution of cultural identities (Ediani & Sajarwa, 2023).

Data 4

Symbol	Dialogue	Visual (Image)
	-	
		Time: 00:07:26
	Signifier	Signified
	A mini playground shaped like a strong sexual connotations.	The combination of red, yellow, and green, which are colors strongly associated with Chinese culture, and the phallic shape of the slide represents Western cultural symbols of sexual freedom.

The mini playground exemplifies material cultural hybridity by blending Chinese symbolism with Western ideals. Its red, yellow, and green color palette reflects traditional Chinese meanings—luck, power, and growth—while its explicit phallic design conveys Western notions of sexual freedom and body expression. This fusion highlights the intersection of tradition and modernity in cultural representation.

Data 5

Symbol	Dialogue	Visual (Image)
	-	
		Time: 01:00:36
	Signifier Audrey and her friends disguise themselves as K-Pop idols at the airport.	Signified Their appearance and fashion style reflect Korean K-Pop culture, adopted by characters from different cultural backgrounds.

The characters' disguise as K-Pop idols exemplifies material cultural hybridity by blending their own identity with elements of K-Pop culture. Their outfits reflect the global influence of South Korean pop culture, demonstrating how music and fashion transcend borders. This transformation highlights cultural globalization and the creation of hybrid identities in fashion and self-expression (Sintowoko, 2021).

Non Material Cultural Hybridization Representation in Joy Ride (2023)

Data 1

Symbol	Dialogue	Visual (Image)
	"It's not about that. But in China, togetherness is more important than individuality, okay? Like me and Arvind. We're not from here, but we feel at home." Time: 00:43:48	-
	Signifier	Signified
	Kenny speaks to Audrey about the characteristics of Chinese people.	The transmission of cultural values regarding the importance of togetherness in Chinese culture, which has a broad context in cross-cultural adaptation.

Kenny's dialogue about togetherness in Chinese culture highlights non-material cultural values of collectivism, emphasizing social relationships and solidarity. Cultural hybridity emerges as these values contrast with Western individualism, which prioritizes personal achievement and autonomy. Through their exchange, Audrey gains insight into collectivist values, while Kenny acknowledges the interaction between collectivism and individualism, fostering cross-cultural understanding.

Data 2

Symbol	Dialogue	Visual (Image)
	"Come on Miss 3000-Billable-Hours, you knew this was coming." Time: 00:05:19	-
	Signifier	Signified
	Frank talks to Audrey about her job promotion.	The nickname represents Western corporate work culture, given to Audrey,

		an Asian descendant trying to internalize Western work culture.
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Audrey’s nickname, "Miss 3000-Billable-Hours," reflects Western corporate values of productivity and efficiency, particularly in legal and financial industries. Despite her Chinese background, she internalizes these values to succeed in her workplace, highlighting cultural hybridity. Her adaptation shows the blending of Western work ethics with her cultural identity, creating a new mode of interaction in the corporate world.

Data 3

Symbol	Dialogue	Visual (Image)
	-	
		Time: 00:50:42
	Signifier	Signified
	Grandma Lolo gives a traditional Chinese fruit to Audrey.	Oranges are a traditional Chinese fruit, and Audrey’s acceptance of the gift signifies her acceptance of cultural heritage, creating a blend of cultural values in interaction.

Audrey’s acceptance of a traditional Chinese fruit from Grandma Lolo symbolizes her acknowledgment of cultural heritage. This act reflects non-material cultural hybridity, as it shows how traditional Chinese values interact with Audrey’s modern identity (Novtarianggi, Sulanjari, & Alfiah, 2020). While influenced by Western culture, she integrates elements from both cultures, creating a complex and blended identity.

Data 4

Symbol	Dialogue	Visual (Image)
	-	
		Time: 00:03:17
	Signifier	Signified
	Audrey’s success in joining a law firm in America.	The Asian work ethic and Western individualism reflect Audrey’s success in overcoming cultural differences to achieve success.

Audrey’s success in an American law firm reflects non-material cultural hybridity, blending Chinese values of hard work, discipline, and education with Western ideals of individualism and ambition. Her achievement showcases her multicultural identity, allowing her to embrace her Chinese heritage while thriving in a Western professional setting. The portrayal of empowered female characters in hybrid settings aligns with the feminist representation of hybrid identities (Nadhira, Sulistyani, & Widagdo, 2024).

Data 5

Symbol	Dialogue	Visual (Image)
	"You just beat him like Mike fucking Tyson" Time: 00:23:49	
		Time: 00:23:38
	Signifier	Signified
	Deadeye speaks to Audrey while playing party slaps.	Deadeye's communication style using Western slang to interact and communicate.

Deadeye's use of Western slang and Audrey's adaptation to it reflect non-material cultural hybridity in communication. Deadeye's casual, informal speech contrasts with the more formal style typical of Chinese culture, requiring Audrey to adjust. This interaction highlights how both characters navigate cultural differences, blending Western and Chinese communication styles to create a more inclusive dialogue.

Data 6

Symbol	Dialogue	Visual (Image)
	"wo ai ni china" Time: 00:49:49	-
	Signifier	Signified
	Audrey shouts to express her admiration.	Audrey's multicultural identity navigates between American and Chinese cultures.

Audrey's expression "Wo ai ni China" reflects her multicultural identity and non-material cultural hybridity. By blending American individualism with Chinese collectivism, she openly expresses pride in her heritage while embracing both cultures. This highlights her ability to navigate and integrate diverse cultural influences in her self-expression.

Mimesis in the Film Joy Ride (2023)

According to Homi K. Bhabha (1994), mimesis refers to how marginalized groups imitate or adapt elements from the dominant culture, often in ways that alter the original meaning of those elements. This study presents four data points indicating mimesis.

Data 1

Symbol	Dialogue	Visual (Image)
	-	
		Time: 00.02.26
	Signifier	Signified
	Lolo poses by flipping the middle finger in a formal photo with classmates.	Flipping the middle finger is a Western cultural gesture, whereas Lolo is of Chinese descent, and this does not exist

		in Chinese culture.
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Lolo’s gesture of flipping the middle finger in a formal photo with her classmates demonstrates mimesis because raising the middle finger is a common gesture in Western culture used for expression or provocation. By doing this, Lolo, who comes from a Chinese cultural background, adopts an element of Western culture that may not exist in traditional Chinese customs. This reflects how individuals from marginalized cultures can imitate behaviors from the dominant culture to integrate or express themselves in social contexts.

Data 2

Symbol	Dialogue	Visual (Image)
	-	
		Time: 01:00:36
	Signifier	Signified
	Audrey and her friends disguise themselves as K-Pop idols at the airport.	Their appearance and fashion style reflect Korean K-Pop culture, adopted by characters from different cultural backgrounds.

Audrey and her friends disguise themselves as K-Pop idols, demonstrating how they adopt elements of Korean pop culture, which is part of the dominant culture, to express themselves. This reflects the process of mimicry, where they imitate styles perceived as appealing within their social context. Mimicry here refers to the act of imitating or adopting elements from another culture, in this case, K-Pop fashion. This mimicry is often done as a way to gain social recognition or feel connected to a larger group. By adopting a style considered attractive, Audrey and her friends strive to integrate and be accepted within their social environment.

Data 3

Symbol	Dialogue	Visual (Image)
	-	
		Time: 00:03:17
	Signifier	Signified
	Audrey’s success in joining a law firm in America.	The Asian work ethic and Western individualism reflect Audrey’s success in overcoming cultural differences to achieve success.

Audrey’s success as a lawyer in America can be seen as a form of mimicry, according to Homi K. Bhabha. She achieves this success by adopting a strong work ethic and the values of individualism often associated with Western culture. In this context, she imitates the thought patterns and behaviors valued in American professional environments, reflecting the process of

mimicry in which individuals from non-Western cultures internalize and adopt elements of the dominant culture to achieve success (Faizah, 2021). By becoming a successful lawyer, Audrey also serves as a representation of people from diverse cultural backgrounds in a professional environment dominated by Western culture.

Data 4

Symbol	Dialogue	Visual (Image)
	-	
		Time: 00:03:30
	Signifier	Signified
	Lolo raising her middle finger in the yearbook photo when given a title by the school.	The title given is a distinctive part of Western school culture, awarded to Lolo, who is of Chinese descent.

Lolo raising her middle finger in the yearbook photo reflects mimicry, as she adopts a Western gesture of defiance to integrate into her school's social norms. This act showcases her adaptation to a Western-influenced environment while expressing her bold and non-traditional identity, illustrating how mimicry helps navigate diverse cultural spaces.

Ambivalence in the Film Joy Ride (2023)

Ambivalence, according to Homi K. Bhabha, refers to the tension and ambiguity that arise when cultural identities clash, often creating space for different interpretations and conflicts. This study presents three data points illustrating ambivalence.

Data 1

Symbol	Dialogue	Visual (Image)
	"Slides are off-limits for Ching Chongs" Time: 00:02:06	-
	Signifier	Signified
	A white child forbids Lolo and Audrey from playing on the slide.	The use of "Ching Chong" in English is a mix of Western culture and a Chinese stereotype used as a mockery or insult toward Chinese descendants.

The situation where a white child forbids Lolo and Audrey from playing on the slide can be seen as ambivalence according to Homi K. Bhabha because Lolo and Audrey, as individuals from different cultural backgrounds, attempt to integrate and participate in an activity considered common and enjoyable in a Western cultural context (Faizah, 2021). However, they are met with rejection, highlighting that they are not entirely accepted in that social space by being called "Ching-Chongs." This creates tension between the desire to participate and the reality of discrimination they face, which is at the core of ambivalence.

Data 2

Symbol	Dialogue	Visual (Image)
	Audrey: "make sure your bag is locked at all times" Lolo: "don't worry, we are in China,	-

	the safest country in the world” Time: 00:28:55	
	Signifier	Signified
	Audrey speaks to Kat and is answered by Lolo.	Audrey’s concern reflects Western perceptions of public spaces, while Lolo represents a local perspective. This contrast highlights how both characters approach the same situation with different viewpoints.

Audrey’s concern about safety reflects Western cultural norms that emphasize caution in public spaces, influenced by media and social narratives. In contrast, Lolo’s confidence is shaped by her local cultural background. This tension highlights cultural hybridity and ambivalence, showing how different cultural perspectives shape their interpretations of the same situation (Setiawan, 2020).

Data 3

	Dialogue	Visual (Image)
	“Another Typical American” Time: 00:25:30	-
Symbol	Signifier	Signified
	Mr. Lim speaks to Audrey in front of Lolo.	Different cultural identities and cultural stereotypes are reflected in Mr. Lim’s perspective on Americans.

The statement "Another Typical American" reflects ambivalence in cultural identity and stereotypes. Mr. Lim’s remark suggests a judgment based on perceived American traits, creating tension between recognition and criticism. This highlights the complexities of cross-cultural interactions, where identity is both acknowledged and scrutinized.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings and discussions conducted on the representation of cultural hybridity in the Asian-American comedy film Joy Ride (2023), 11 data points reflect cultural hybridity. Hybridity is evident in the characters’ daily lives. This is reflected in aspects of mimicry, which appear in four scenes, such as Lolo posing with a middle finger gesture as a way of balancing Western norms. Another example is the adoption of K-Pop-inspired fashion styles to gain social recognition and connect with other social groups. Additionally, Audrey's success as a lawyer and Lolo receiving the title of “Most Likely to Get Arrested” also illustrate elements of mimicry.

Meanwhile, ambivalence is demonstrated through the tension between the desire to participate and the reality of discrimination, the conflict between Western attitudes and traditional Chinese values, as well as cultural stereotypes in cross-cultural interactions.

This study shows that the film effectively portrays the cultural hybridity between Asian and American cultures through various aspects such as characters, narrative, and visual elements. These findings illustrate how cultural hybridity manifests in Joy Ride (2023), highlighting the complexities of identity negotiation in a multicultural world (Utami & Endah Sokowati, 2021). Furthermore, the film successfully utilizes comedy as a tool to navigate cultural tensions, making cultural hybridity a form of social reflection and critique of cultural stereotypes against Asian-American identities.

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