The following excerpt is from Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan's novel *A Tiger in the Kitchen*, published in 2011. In this passage, Cheryl is learning to cook new foods to explore her cultural identity and embarks on a trip to her hometown village to learn more about her Teochew origins. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how the author uses literary elements and techniques to convey Cheryl's complex reaction to the events during Cheryl's visit to her hometown.

Our first meal with the villagers would be like all our other meals -- filled with men. And me. We entered the private dining room of the restaurant to find ourselves penetrating a plume of cigarette smoke. Michael introduced us as fellow Tans -- family -- from Singapore and New York. I leapt into action, firmly shaking everyone's hand and telling them my name in Mandarin, Rulian. The village chief was there, a stout, comfortable-looking man who appeared to be in his sixties but had a full head of hair that looked dyed to unnatural blackness and the belly of someone who did not want for much. He gestured for us to take a seat at the dinner table. I headed straight for the chair in a corner at the farthest end thinking nothing of it. The meal was a several-courser -- fried tofu, fish, a heaping plate of noodles. We'd brought bottles of wine as a gift for the village head, so we shared several toasts. I was surprised they'd poured me a glass, too, and merrily drank along, clinking glasses with my new uncles.

They spoke Mandarin, yes, but were most comfortable with Teochew, a dialect I barely understood. By the end of dinner, however, I felt I was starting to get the hang of it. As we stood around outside the restaurant, the men embroiled in deep conversations, I nodded, listened, and smiled along.

"Do you know what they're saying?" my dad asked, looking amused.

"They're talking about the dinner tonight, right?"

"No, lah! They're talking about what we're going to do tomorrow!"

I was suddenly glad I hadn't tried to say anything -- not that I really would have known what to say in Teochew. (In fact, my Mandarin, which I really speak in New York or Singapore, wasn't functioning very well either. Shortly after, when I wanted to borrow a pen to write something down, it was fortunate that I thought to check with Dad about the wording. I had been about to ask the village chief if I could borrow his *bizi*, or "nose," instead of *bi*.)

Just when I was starting to feel a little morose about the days ahead, however, one of the villagers asked, "Have you heard of this phrase, '*Teochew nang, paxi bo xiang gang'?"* Now, I'd heard one saying regarding *Teochew nang*, which means "Teochew people," and it was *Teochew nang, kacherng ang ang.* It's a popular saying in Singapore -- a school yard taunt at times -- that basically means "Teochew people have red backsides." I wondered if this saying was popular in China as well. I wondered if I should ask. But I decided it might not be the best question on the very first night.

"No," I said instead. "What does it mean?"

"It basically means that Teochew people, you beat them until they're close to death but they'll still survive," he said. "We're strong."

I liked that -- perhaps not as much as my red-behind saying, but I felt I was learning something about my people, about me.

In the car ride back to our hotel in Chaozhou, a picturesque historic city on the water, our driver said, "You can see this car in the front? No license plate also can still drive." It was true; among the cars madly zigzagging across the intersection, this one had absolutely no identification. "Here," he said, proudly, "anything can happen. You want to do something, you can just do it.

I was beginning to like the sound of my people. It was starting to explain some things about my family and, perhaps, me.

In the passage below, from *A Tiger in the Kitchen* (2011) by Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan, Mrs. Tan is making kaya with her Ah-Ma and Auntie Alice. Consider how Auntie Alice and Mrs. Tan confront their desires to experiment in the kitchen while abiding by the guidance of their Ah-Ma. In a well-developed essay, analyze how the author explores the complex interplay between individuality and tradition in the passage. You may wish to consider such literary techniques such as dialogue, narrative pace, and tone.

"Making *kaya* was simple," she said. We quickly got to work in my uncle's modern kitchen, which he'd kitted out with sleek appliances and a large, gleaming countertop. First, we cracked ten eggs into a large bowl and whisked them together. Then we added about a cup of sugar and the coconut milk, mixing it all up well. Next, Ah-Ma instructed us to place the mixture in a glass bowl, add a few knotted pandan leaves, perch that bowl, stop a rack in a wok, and just let it steam for forty-five minutes or so. Aunty Alice and I looked at each other. "Mummy ah, we don't need to stir it, meh?" Auntie Alice gently asked. Ah-Ma shook her head and hands vigorously. *"Mieng, mieng!"* she said in Hokkien. Auntie Alice and I looked at each other again. This just didn't sound right. *Kaya* is supposed to be smooth, creamy, and easy to spread. I hadn't spent that much time cooking at this point, but I did feel I knew enough to predict how steaming a bunch of eggs, untouched, for forty-five minutes would end up. Just letting the eggs, sugar, and coconut milk steam for forty- five minutes without any stirring was likely to produce a dense, cakelike custard -- one that I envisioned us being able to cut up into neat slices, not spread easily over crusty, hot toast. Could Ah-Ma -- who had spent the morning telling us that she couldn't quite remember how to make the dishes she had been known for -- possibly have misremembered?

I had been afraid of not having enough *kaya* for three households -- my mother's, Auntie Alice's, and Ah-Ma's -- so I'd brought enough ingredients for two batches. "Well…," Auntie Alice finally said, giving me a meaningful look, "since we have enough for another batch, why don't we just make one batch Ah-Ma's way and one batch that we stir during steaming? Just try lah - experiment!" Ah-Ma shrugged, giving us a distinct "you're wasting your time" look. Auntie Alice and I im- mediately got to work, whipping together the second batch of *kaya*. Onto the steamer that went, and we started stirring it periodically. Looking at the two *kayas* side by side, we were glad we had decided to try the second batch our way. Ah-Ma's method was yielding a *kaya* that resembled a pudding. The yellow-green custard was puffing up slightly and looked distinctly solid. The *kaya* that Auntie Alice and I were diligently stirring, however, was looking nice and soft. As the smell of coconut and vanilla-like pandan seeped into the air, we were feeling good about our *kaya*. I began to envision the breakfast of *kaya* toast, hot and buttery, that I'd have the next day.

After forty-five minutes, however, our impressions changed. When we removed the two bowls of *kaya*, Auntie Alice and I smiled knowingly at first, as we noticed that Ah-Ma's remained pudding-like while ours looked like a chunky rubble of jam. Then Ah-Ma gestured to us to stir up her kaya. It yielded easily to our spoon, forming a creamy, silken mass as we stirred. The version that Auntie Alice and I had concocted, however, remained lumpen and unappetizing no matter how much we tried to whip it into a smooth froth. And when we spread both *kayas* on bread, ours had an alarming grainy texture while Ah-Ma's was perfectly smooth. Just as it should have been.

Ah-Ma didn't say anything. Auntie Alice and I winced. The students had been arrogant enough to second-guess the teacher -- someone who had brought decades of experience to the kitchen counter only to be given the fish eye and sidelined. And we had learned a lesson, indeed. Silently, I vowed to listen to my grandmother more.

Quietly, we packed up our *kaya* and hugged Ah-Ma goodbye. Just before letting me go, however, my grandmother gave me one final instruction: "Next time, bring a baby for Ah-Ma."