



THE PRESENTATION OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN DISNEY'S FILM *MULAN* (2020)



CHENGHUI SHEN

Graduate School Srinakharinwirot University

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THE PRESENTATION OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN DISNEY'S FILM *MULAN* (2020)



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THE PRESENTATION OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN DISNEY'S FILM *MULAN* (2020)

BY
CHENGHUI SHEN

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(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Chatchai Ekpanyaskul, MD.)

Dean of Graduate School

ORAL DEFENSE COMMITTEE

..... Major-advisor

(Asst. Prof. Dr. Supaporn Yimwilai)

..... Chair

(Asst. Prof. Dr. Khomduen Phothisuwan)

..... Committee

(Dr. Wiriya Dankamphaengkaew)

Title	THE PRESENTATION OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN DISNEY'S FILM <i>MULAN</i> (2020)
Author	CHENGHUI SHEN
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Thesis Advisor	Assistant Professor Dr. Supaporn Yimwilai

This study aims to analyze the presentations of female characters in the Disney film *Mulan* (2020) and also the patriarchal concepts of the presentation of female characters. *Theorizing Patriarchy* by Sylvia Walby was adopted in this research as a framework. The findings showed that women were oppressed in a male-dominated system in which women were taught to be submissive and obedient. Hua Mulan and Xianniang were portrayed to challenge and refuse the traditional roles of obedient women. The findings also showed that there were three main areas in which women were under the control of men, which included household, paid work, and cultural institutions. With regard to these patriarchal aspects, the film revealed an asymmetrical gender relationship between the male and female characters. Even though the film revealed an attempt to challenge the notion of these patriarchal aspects through the portrayal of Hua Mulan and Xianniang, who pursued becoming a warrior. In the end, the film still presented Hua Mulan as following the traditional role of a woman who knew “her (female) place”, and killed Xianniang, who was a threat to the patriarchal system. Although both Hua Mulan and Xianniang did not change the system of male-domination, the challenge to the patriarchy of them will inspire more women to realize their value and to change the inequitable patriarchal system.

Keyword : Patriarchy, Confucianism, Mulan, Oppression

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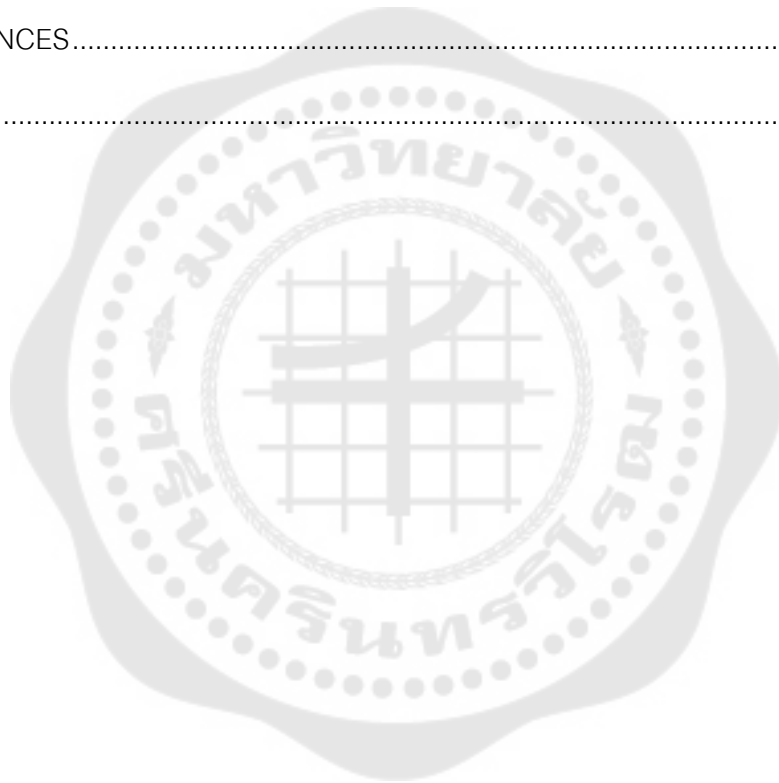
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Hua Mulan is the most widely known heroine in Chinese history. The story of Hua Mulan, a brave daughter who dresses up as a male to replace her elderly father to fight in the army, affected many generations of Chinese people. Historically, there is no proof of the existence of Hua Mulan. Most of what is depicted in films were based on the Chinese poem *Mulan Ci* or *The Ballad of Mulan* (Y. Xu, 1994). In the ballad, there was a government regulation that each family in a village must nominate a male to join the army. The only man in Mulan's family was her elderly ailing father. Mulan knew that her father was too weak and too sick to join and fight in the army. Mulan realized that if her father did join the army, he would not return home alive. Therefore, Mulan decided to take over her father's duty of being a soldier. She dressed herself up as a man and fought with her comrades in the army for her motherland. After she came back home victoriously, she changed her identity back to be a woman, which in turn shocked all of her comrades (Liu, 2016; Shen, 2010; Z. Wang, 2020; Yang, 2018).

Her story and her image become a great figure to inspire women to seek gender equality as well as to celebrate the concept of nationalism. Therefore, there are many literary works about Hua Mulan, such as the poem *Mulan Ci*¹, the earliest record of the story of Mulan, the play *Mulan Joins the Army* (1917) starred by Mei Lanfang, the first Mulan film in China *Hua Mulan Joins the Army* (1927) released by Tianyi Film Company, and the most famous version in China *Hua Mulan, or Rise of a Warrior* (2009) directed by Ma Chucheng, etc.

In America, the Disney Company put the classical Chinese legend Hua Mulan on the screen and launched its 36th animated film "*Mulan 1*" in 1998. According to

¹Generally, *Mulan Ci* is a poem created in China during in the Northern Wei Dynasty (386 AD-534 AD). However, no record can be found of the first author of this poem. It was compiled in the *Collection of Yuefu Poems* (2010) by Guo Maoqian (1041 AD – 1099 AD) in Song Dynasty.

IMDB² (2021), this animated film has an IMDB score of 5.7 out of 10. Among them, 60 percent of the audience gave a good score of 6 or higher. Thanks to the Disney company, Hua Mulan becomes the most well-known heroine worldwide.

Soon after the new poster of a live-action remake *Mulan* (2020) from Disney was announced, many people were immediately inspired to create fan art for Mulan. This is the result obtained when searching for “Mulan” on Tumblr³. The top few pictures have a popularity of more than 190,000 viewings. According to the Beijing News (2020), as of September 14, Disney’s live-action movie *Mulan* (2020) has made \$37.6 million at the box offices in 17 markets around the world. Among them, \$23.2 million was achieved in China’s mainland market, becoming the film’s largest box office hit. The rest of the world has seen sporadic results, including \$4 million in the Middle East in two weeks, \$2.3 million in Thailand in two weeks, \$1.9 million in Taiwan, \$1.8 million in Russia, and \$1.5 million in Singapore in two weeks. According to IMDB (2021), *Mulan* (2020) won several awards such as “Excellence in Fantasy Film” “The Action Movie of 2020” and won several award nominations including “Best Action Movie” and “Best Actress In An Action Movie.” This version did not only let more people around the world know about the story of Mulan, but it also brought more attention to the topics of feminism and Chinese culture.

One of the reasons that this 2020 version becomes a sensational is because it tries to present different image of Hua Mulan comparing to the animated version. This new version of Hua Mulan maybe a result of the increasing of the awareness of feminism as well as the pursuit of independence and equal rights of women in Europe and America. In this regard, when Disney remade this story, it made a lot of changes to be more in line with the thinking of Europeans and Americans by discarding some traditional Chinese culture, which also made her gradually move away from her original

² IDMB is an acronym for Internet Movie Database. It’s an online database of information related to films, television programs, home videos, video games, and streaming content online including cast, production crew, and personal biographies, plot summaries, trivia, ratings, and fan, and critical reviews.

³ Tumblr is an American microblogging and social networking website.

appearance in Chinese ancient books. It is more popular with European and American audiences.

However, the images of Mulan in Disney's narration are very different from the traditional poem from *Mulan Ci*. Even though many studies claimed that the Disney version is all too American for Chinese movie audiences (Ding, 2014; Mo, 2015; Negara, 2021), this version has achieved overwhelming popularity and made the story of Mulan well known throughout the world. In addition, some scholars (Astuti, 2015; Wibisono, 2018) studied Mulan from a gender perspective. In their studies, the main focus is on Disney's animation films. The studies show a strong sense of feminism in the portrayal of women in Disney films, while also pointing out that women are in an oppressed and unequal position.

Although there are many studies on Mulan's character in Disney films "*Mulan I*" (1998) and "*Mulan II*" (2004), there are limited studies on the live-action film *Mulan* (2020) from a gender perspective. Therefore, this study aims to study the presentations of female characters and to identify and analyze the patriarchal concept in the presentation of female characters in Disney's film *Mulan* (2020). By examining and exploring the presentations of female characters in *Mulan* (2020), this study contributes to raising awareness of the position of women in a patriarchal society.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the presentations of female characters in Disney's Film *Mulan* (2020)
2. To analyze the patriarchal concepts in the presentation of female characters in Disney's Film *Mulan* (2020)

1.3 Significances of the Study

This study will be beneficial in the following aspects:

1. It helps readers understand the presentations of female characters in Disney's film *Mulan* (2020).

2. It helps readers understand the patriarchal concept that appears in the presentation of female characters in Disney's film *Mulan* (2020).

3. This study can be used as a guideline for further study on the presentation of female characters in Disney's films.

4. This study will raise awareness of the position of women in the patriarchal society.

1.4 Scope of the Research

The study focuses on the presentation of female characters in Disney's Film *Mulan* (2020). Two main female characters, which are Mulan and Xianniang (the Witch), were selected to analyze and find out which areas of their lives that were under the patriarchal system according to the patriarchal concept by Sylvia Walby. Therefore, this research used Sylvia Walby's book, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Walby, 1990) as a theoretical framework.

1.5 Definition of Terms

1. **Patriarchy:** According to Sylvia Walby's book, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (1990), patriarchy is a "system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women" (p. 20). She identified six areas in which women are under the control of men which are: the patriarchal mode of production in the household, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality, and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions.

1.1 The Patriarchal Production Relations in the Household

It means that women's works within the household are controlled by men who are their husbands or others who live there. Within the household, women are required to give all kinds of services to their husbands, children, and other members of the family. Therefore, the housewives are the "homemakers" while the husbands are the "breadwinners" (Walby, 1990, p. 21).

1.2 The Patriarchal Relations in Paid Work

It means that under the patriarchal society, women are excluded from better-paid work and often find themselves in less demanding roles than their male counterparts. They are usually working in a job that requires less skills and receives low wages.

1.3 The Patriarchal Relations in Cultural Institutions

It refers to the institutions such as religion, education, and media that set up the representation of women within a patriarchal gaze. These institutions portray women through a patriarchal viewpoint which contributes to women's understanding of femininity such as passivity, gentleness, and emotionality (Walby, 1990, pp. 90-91).

1.4 Patriarchal relations in Sexuality

It refers to the aspects of male dominance through sexuality. For example, Walby claimed that heterosexuality is an important patriarchal structure (Walby, 1990, p. 109). Marriage is a form of control that ties women's sexuality to one patriarchal agent for a lifetime (Walby, 1990, p. 124).

1.5 Male Violence

Male violence denotes the different kinds of acts against women such as rape, sexual assault, wife-beating, workplace sexual harassment, and child sexual abuse. Walby stated that male violence is not random or individual as it might appear, but it occurs due to the patriarchal social structures that both provide the opportunity and encourage male violence to women (Walby, 1990, pp. 128-129).

1.6 The Patriarchal Relations in the State

This means that the state can be inherently oppressive to women through policies and laws such as the issue of employment, divorce, etc. (Walby, 1990, pp. 150-151).

2. Feminism: Feminism is a "theory and/or movement concerned with advancing the position of women through such means as achievement of political, legal, or economic rights equal to those granted men" (Offen, 1988).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research examines the presentation of female characters in Disney's Film *Mulan* (2020). It also aims to find out and analyze which areas of their lives were under the patriarchal system according to the patriarchal concept by Sylvia Walby. Therefore, this research used Sylvia Walby's theory, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Walby, 1990) as a theoretical framework. Furthermore, the concept of radical feminism and patriarchy are intertwined. Therefore, the concept of patriarchy by Sylvia Walby, Radical Feminism, and related studies about *Mulan* will be examined in this chapter.

1. The Concept of Radical Feminism

The word "feminism" appeared first in France in the 1880s (Offen, 1988). According to Offen (1988), feminism is defined as "a theory and/or movement concerned with advancing the position of women through such means as achievement of political, legal, or economic rights equal to those granted men" Feminism is also a social theory that uses women's experiences as a source and motivation to fight against gender discrimination and for equal rights for men and women.

In the development of feminist movements, many different feminist schools emerged, such as liberal feminism, Marxist Feminism, Postmodern feminism and radical feminism, and so on. The essential claims of all of them emphasize the equal rights of women (Walby, 1990).

Radical feminism is one of the factions of feminism, which emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s during the second wave of the feminist movement (Talbot, 2015). Radical feminism believes that a systematic and institutionalized patriarchal political system has led to the oppression of women by men in all parts of society (including but not limited to industry, agriculture, military, government, universities, secondary schools, sexuality). Its most basic point is that female oppression is the most profound of all forms of exploitation and underlies all other oppressions (Rowland & Klein, 1996; Sultana, 2010). As Rowland and Klein (1996) state that "radical feminism looks at the

roots of women's oppression" (p. 9). Therefore, radical feminism seeks to find ways to liberate women from this oppression.

The most significant theoretical construct of radical feminism is the theory of patriarchy (Ward, 1995). Kate Millett (2000) is one of the first people to introduce the concept of "patriarchy" into feminist theory. Her book *Sexual Politics* is one of the most important foundational texts for radical feminist theory. According to Millett (2000), patriarchy is a system of power that organizes society into a complex of relationships based on an arrangement "whereby the group of persons is controlled by another" (p. 122). She also mentioned that patriarchy contains double meanings; male shall dominate female, and elder male shall dominate younger.

Many radical feminists argue that when comparing radical feminism to liberal feminism, equality and sexual ideology is significantly more prominent than in liberal feminism. They also argue that patriarchy oppresses women into a system characterized by power, domination, hierarchy, and competition (Jensen, 2021; Sultana, 2010; Walby, 1990; Ward, 1995). This system cannot be transformed. It can only be eradicated and eliminated from its roots and veins. It is necessary to overthrow not only the legal, political, and economic structures of the patriarchy, but also the state, society, and especially the family (Millett, 2000).

Additionally, radical feminism focuses on the male and female bodies and forces people to start thinking about how males use, abuse, and exploit females in the realm of reproduction and sexuality. Jensen (2021) argues as follows:

The physical, psychological, and spiritual suffering endured by women varies widely, again depending on other attributes and sometimes just on the luck of the draw, but no woman escapes some level of that suffering. And at the core of that system is men's assertion of a right to control women's reproductive power and sexuality. (p. 4)

As Jensen has mentioned that females are in a position of domination by males, and this brings them great spiritual suffering. Consequently, radical feminists began to change their views in the 1970s. They attributed the low status of women to their

biological state and shifted to condemning the biological state of men. Therefore, radical feminism went to a radical extreme. Many radical feminists advocated the rejection of men, regarded the male tendency to violate women as innate, and treated men as the enemy (Willis, 1984).

For that reason, some scholars have also raised criticisms of radical feminism and pointed out that it fails to explain how biological gender becomes social gender. If the reason for males oppressing females is attributed to something being biologically wrong and it is biology that makes them cruel. Then it is difficult to argue that this oppressive relationship can be changed.

2. The Concept of Confucianism

Confucianism is a philosophical and religious system of ancient China, based on the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Kong Zi (popularly known as Confucius). Kong Zi (551 B.C. - April 11, 479 B.C.) as the founder of the Confucianism, is a great thinker, statesman and educator in ancient China especially on the field of education. Therefore, Confucius is also known as “China’s first teacher” (Littlejohn, 2017; Rarick, 2007; Tan, 2017). Through the Confucius’ teachings, benevolence, righteousness, ritual, knowledge, integrity, loyalty, filial piety, abstinence and some other ideas are described and applied to Chinese society for thousands of years (Ackerman, Hu, & Wei, 2009; Chou, Tu, & Huang, 2013; Sun, 2013). Confucius’ philosophy and ideas are compiled by Confucius’ disciples after his death into the book *the Analects*. As a major masterpiece of Confucianism, *the Analects* of Confucius mainly records the words and deeds of Confucius and Confucius’ disciples, which also reflects Confucius’ thoughts in a more concentrated way. It has also been studied and revered by the people for thousands of years and has had a profound impact on Chinese culture.

Confucianism emphasizes the authority of relationships between people (Hogarth, 1999). That is “Minister serving ruler, son serving father, and wife serving husband” (Dau-Lin, 1970, p. 29). The relationships between people form the teaching of Confucius as follows:

Duke Jing of Qi asked Confucius about governance. Confucius replied, "Let the ruler be ruler, ministers ministers, fathers fathers, sons sons." The Duke said, "Excellent! Truly, if the ruler is not ruler, ministers not ministers, fathers not fathers, sons not sons, though I possess grain, will I be able to eat it?" (Eno, 2015, p. 62)

In human relationships, the ruler is the master and the minister is the subordinate; the father is the master and the son is the subordinate; the husband is the master and the wife is the subordinate. This has presented in the feudal imperial domination and also led to the establishment of the dominance of the ruler, the father and the husband. Zhan (1996) points out that China is an agricultural society ruled by a patriarchal hierarchy of emperors from the Han Dynasty (202 BC-220 AD) to the Qing Dynasty (1664-1911). China is a country with distinct hierarchical relationships and with a feudal domination for thousands of years. The emperor was the highest-ranking ruler of the country and the father of all people in ancient China. Therefore, under the feudal domination society, the Confucian concept of relationship was also penetrated into the Chinese system of government and religion, social customs and psychological habits for more than two thousand years.

Confucianism also emphasizes the importance of "Filial piety." According to Eno (2015), Filial piety (xiao) is "a traditional cultural imperative, obedience to parents, raised to a subtle level of fundamental self-discipline and character building" (p. 7). Filial piety also is a core element in family. For sons, it is considered filial piety to glorify the ancestors and to inherit the family. For women, obeying their parents is considered filial piety, and being virtuous in running the household is considered filial piety for women. It can be seen that men and women have different division of labor in the family. Therefore, it is obvious that the presentation of filial piety for women is always centered on the family. Then, unlike women, men can work in the public and to realize their self-worth and bring honor to the family in the army, which is male filial piety. On the contrary, a woman who does the same as a man is considered to be disgrace to the family and unfilial (Littlejohn, 2017; Rarick, 2007; Tan, 2017).

In Confucian culture, filial piety has always been a traditional virtue to be preached and learned. However, during the reign of feudal society, the manner in which filial piety is achieved varies by gender. If women are to achieve this required filial piety, they are unknowingly confined to the home and have no opportunity to go out and fight for the same benefits as men. The subordination of women in China is directly influenced by the Confucian education of women's "virtue" and "conduct." Women were taught to be subservient to men, which continued for generations. Confucianism has conservative rules for women in the form of the "three obediences and four virtues" (Chang, 2020; Jirong, 2006). It is considered to be the most important ideological restraints for Chinese women. The "three obediences" mean that women should be obedient to their fathers before marriage, to their husbands after marriage, and to their sons after the death of their husbands. At that time, the criterion of whether a woman was good or not was obedience. The "four virtues" are morality, proper speaking, modesty in manners, and diligence in needlework (Chang, 2020; Jirong, 2006).

As one of the most influential beliefs in the history of Chinese culture, Confucianism has had a profound influence on Chinese culture for thousands of years. In the film *Mulan* (2020), Confucianism, as a source of authority in Chinese culture, attests to the subordination of women in a patriarchal Chinese culture. As Walby (1990) mentioned that "religion is an authoritative source of justification for the subordination of women" (p. 101).

3. The Concept of Patriarchy

This study examined patriarchy, the central assertion of radical feminism. The patriarchal theory maintains that the primary element of patriarchy is a relationship of dominance, where one group is dominant and exploits the other group for the benefit of the former (Jensen, 2021; Sultana, 2010; Talbot, 2015; Toneli, Adrião, & Perucchi, 2013). As Jensen (2021) states:

Patriarchy is a system that delivers material benefits to men—unequally depending on men’s other attributes (such as race, class, sexual orientation, nationality, immigration status) and on men’s willingness to embrace, or at least adapt to, patriarchal values. (p. 4)

There is a stronger emphasis on the male oppression of females in the patriarchy. Walby (1990) states that “the concept and theory of patriarchy is essential to capture the depth, pervasiveness and interconnectedness of different aspects of women’s subordination.” In *Theorizing Patriarchy* (1990), Sylvia Walby argues that there are six patriarchal structures which restrict women and maintain male domination. The six patriarchal structures are the patriarchal mode of production in the household, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality, and patriarchal relations to cultural institutions.

This research adopted this patriarchy theory of Sylvia Walby as a theoretical framework to study the patriarchal concept in the presentation of female characters in Disney’s film *Mulan* (2020). According to the researcher’s preliminary investigation, there are three main aspects reflected in *Mulan* (2020). Therefore, the researcher will give a detailed overview of these three aspects.

3.1 The Patriarchal Relations in Cultural Institutions

It refers to the institutions such as religion, education, and media that set up the representation of women within a patriarchal gaze. These institutions portray women through a patriarchal viewpoint which contributes to women’s understanding of femininity such as passivity, gentleness, and emotionality (Walby, 1990, pp. 90-91).

There is an opposite concept to distinguish the relationship between men and women in the ideological realm, which is called masculinity and femininity. Walby (1990) argues that “idea about masculinity and femininity are to be found in all areas of social relations; they are parts of actions which go to make up the patriarchal structures” (p. 90).

According to socialization theory, socialization causes masculinity and femininity. Firstly, masculinity and femininity arise and take on their primary contrasting

features in childhood. For example, children are taught which toys are made for which gender. Culture has made specific assigned behaviors for men and women. Walby (1990) states it as a “mirror opposite” (p. 91). On one hand, boys seem to be more active and lively, while on the other hand, girls are more passive and emotional. After that, some media such as books, magazines, and television promoted this differentiation between masculinity and femininity. Subsequently, people can often know that many men will favor science subjects, whereas women are more likely to choose arts. This is because education also continues this differentiation. Although it appears that students themselves actively choose such different subjects, many scholars believe that this choice is their preparation for the different divisions of labor in the workforce as adults.

3.2 The Patriarchal Production Relations in the Household

This means that women’s works within the household are controlled by men who are their husbands or others who live there. Within the household, women are required to give all kinds of services to their husbands, children, and other members of the family (Walby, 1990, p. 21).

Family is very vital for every man and woman but it is less necessary than it is thought to be. Walby (1990) points out that in the family division of labor, men are divided as “breadwinners”, while women are “homemakers” (p. 91).

In the household divisions, the man plays the “instrumental role”, and the woman plays another “expressive role.” Furthermore, Walby (1990) criticizes that “men have the task of being oriented to the external world while women are oriented to look after the internal needs of the family members” (p. 63). Women are seen as nurturers and child bearers. Their household chores are not regarded as work and men benefit from their unpaid work.

Therefore, the patriarchal production relations in the household are completely inequitable. This reflects the fact that the male is the dominant one in household production and the female is only subordinate.

3.3 The Patriarchal Relations in Paid Work

It means that under the patriarchal society, women are excluded from better-paid work and often find themselves in less demanding roles than their male counterparts. This aspect is being widely used to discriminate against women. Men always dominate the higher-paying jobs because they overestimate their abilities and talents. Women are perceived to be less work-oriented and deserve lower wage rates. This has led to a decline in women's morale and their reluctance to commit to their jobs. In addition, certain companies are so biased that they do not allow women to work in their companies. Low wages and fewer job opportunities contribute to the establishment of patriarchy (Walby, 1990, pp. 25-31).

Therefore, there are a lot of radical feminists making a voice of "personal is political" (Walby, 1990, p. 156). This is an important aspect of radical feminism. It was used as a rallying slogan during the development of the second wave of the feminist movement. It emphasized the connection between personal experience and larger social and political structures. Walby (1990) states that "women came to see their problems not as private woes, but as public issues" (p. 156). In conclusion, the core emphasis of radical feminism is on patriarchy. With a slogan called "personal is political", many radical feminists are challenging the oppression and domination of women by men in patriarchal society (Walby, 1990, p. 3).

4. Related Studies of Mulan

In a general sense, Mulan was created in the Northern Wei Dynasty (386 AD-534 AD) (Z. Wang, 2020). The story of Mulan has been studied by many people. Over the years, many scholars have interpreted Mulan and her story from different perspectives. A large proportion of these scholars did the studies under different cultural lenses. They compared the different interpretations of the Mulan story and explored the cultural differences between China and the West. Ding (2014) described that Mulan image in the Disney film had become a cross-cultural phenomenon. The author stated that the movies *Mulan I* (1998) and *Mulan II* (2004) were a fusion of the original Chinese story of Mulan and the American understanding of Chinese culture. He

believed that the Disney version of Mulan was the product of a mutual collision and fusion of Chinese and Western cultures.

Mo (2015) compared Disney Mulan film (1998) and Chinese Mulan drama (1998) from a cross-cultural perspective. In Mo's research, 200 Chinese people, as sampling, watched Disney Mulan film and Chinese Mulan drama. The survey revealed that the audiences had different feelings about the two films. The main difference was that after watching the Disney Mulan film (1998) that the Mulan character portrayal of Mulan in a version reflected a strong cultural orientation, individualism, and masculinity. On the contrary, the Chinese Mulan drama (1998) represented a strong cultural orientation of collectivism and femininity.

M. Xu and Tian (2013), discussed and explored bidirectional transfer between American and Chinese culture in their research. But the focus of their discussion was to compare the original Mulan poem with the Disney film *Mulan I* (1998). By analyzing the additions, omissions, specifications, generalizations, and explications of the production of the Disney film *Mulan I* (1998), the research explored the cultural borrowings and rewritings that existed and adopted in different cultures. They also mentioned that preserving and passing on culture depended on constant innovation, which resulted from intercultural integration and rewritings. However, there are certain limitations of this study. This research only showed the existence and application of cultural borrowing and rewriting between cultures, and demonstrated the importance of such borrowing and rewriting for cultural survival and innovation. They do not provide a practical and reliable methodology for intercultural borrowing and rewriting.

Christina and Suprajitno (2014) studied the Americanization of Confucian "filial piety" in Disney film *Mulan I* (1998). Filial piety is one of the most important and well-known virtues of respect for one's parents, elders, and ancestors in Chinese culture (Slote & De Vos, 1998). As the core of Confucian moral thought, filial piety has a history of more than 5,000 years and has always had a significant influence on the behavior and way of thinking of the Chinese people. It has even had a profound influence in many Asian countries such as Japan, Korea, and Thailand. In this research, the filial piety

embodied in the film has deviated from the original Confucian filial piety. It was a kind of rewritten and innovative filial piety by the Disney's company. The researcher also mentioned that Disney has created a hybrid version of the legend by combining elements of Western and Eastern cultures.

In terms of the gender perspective, there are two works that studied *Mulan* from a gender perspective. Astuti (2015) studied male domination as popular culture in *Mulan I* (1998) from the Disney version. The researcher tried to analyze the representation and influence of male domination in Chinese society. It was evident in many action scenes in the movie in which *Mulan* acted as a superhero. She was commended by the emperor for her courageous efforts in the army and on the battlefield. However, the process of her success was always helped by men, as much as her success was recognized by the emperor. It means that the male-dominant was the popular culture in traditional Chinese society. Wibisono (2018) studied the Disney movie *Mulan I* through the lenses of feminist theory. According to the study, *Mulan* as a feminist representative is conveying a feminist, which is the fight for equal rights and recognition.

From the review of the related studies, it shows that the cultural differences between China and the West by comparing the different versions of *Mulan* films. However, the study on patriarchy in *Mulan* (2020) has not found yet. The researcher therefore proposes to study the patriarchal concepts in the presentation of female characters in Disney's Film *Mulan* (2020).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In this research study, qualitative strategies are used in the research design. A qualitative research method was adopted to analyze the female characters in the 2020 live-action remake *Mulan* by Disney's company. Through the analysis of the main female characters such as Hua Mulan, the witch Xianniang, Hua Mulan's mother and Hua Mulan's sister, ect, the patriarchal concepts in the presentation of female characters in Disney's Film *Mulan* (2020) were studied and identified.

Data Collection

In adopting content analysis, this research collected the original materials Disney live-action movie *Mulan* (2020). The subject of this study is the Disney's Film *Mulan* (2020) with a duration of 1 hour 50 minutes and 58 seconds. The data for the study included the characters and storyline of the film. The researcher wanted to study the presentations of the female characters in Disney's Film *Mulan* (2020).

To do this research, the researcher had a procedure as follows:

3.1 Reviewed the related literature

- 3.1.1 Studied Disney's Film *Mulan* (2020)
- 3.1.2 Studied the concept of Patriarchy
- 3.1.3 Explored related studies on Mulan

3.2 Analysis of the Texts

The researcher used the concept of patriarchy as a theoretical framework to analyze the data of the study. In this study, the researcher also used content analysis to analyze Disney's Film *Mulan* (2020), focusing on different areas of the female characters' lives that were under patriarchal control.

3.3 Report Findings

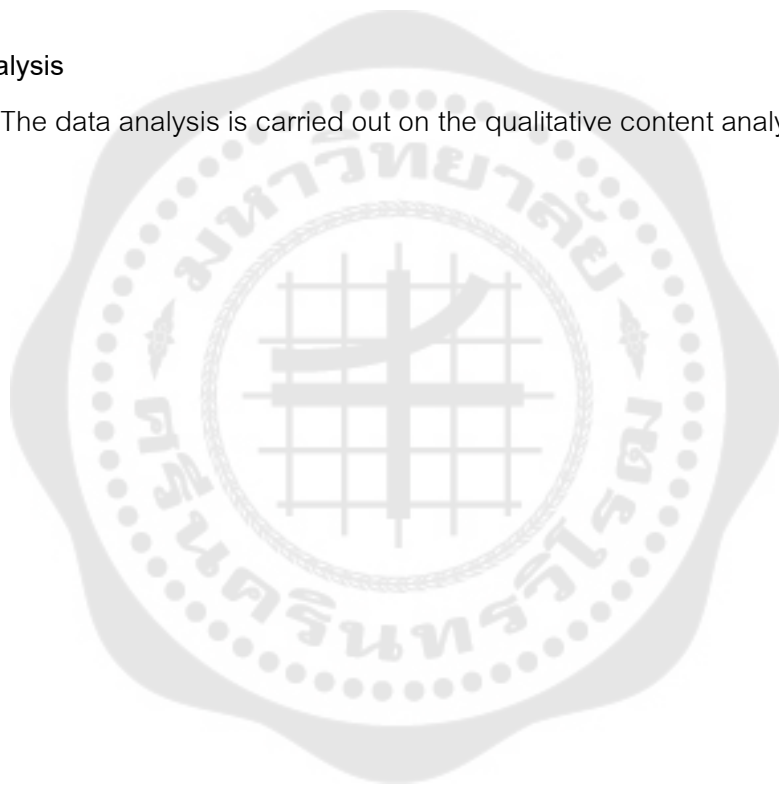
The researcher reported the presentations of the female characters in Disney's Film *Mulan* (2020). Then, the researcher identified and analyzed the patriarchal concept that was presented through the narrative of each female's character.

3.4 Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Studies

The conclusion of the study was discussed and was presented suggestions for further studies.

Data Analysis

The data analysis is carried out on the qualitative content analysis.



CHAPTER 4

THE ANALYSIS OF *MULAN* (2020)

Walby's concept of patriarchy was applied to prove that there were patriarchal concepts in the presentation of female characters in *Mulan* (2020) such as Hua Mulan, Hua Mulan's mother, Hua Mulan's sister, and Xianniang (popularly known as the Witch). In the film, *Mulan* (2020), the great majority of females were on the oppressed side. Therefore, the study analyzed *Mulan* (2020) in terms of the female characters presented in the film and discussed the presentation of the patriarchal concepts that appeared in Disney's film *Mulan*. This chapter was categorized into three topics: the patriarchal relations in paid work, the patriarchal mode of production in the household, and the patriarchal relations in cultural institutions,

4.1 The Patriarchy in *Mulan* (2020)

According to Walby (1990), "patriarchy" is a "system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women." Walby discusses six structures in which women are under the control of men which are: the patriarchal mode of production in the household, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality, and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions. In this film, three structures are presented, which are the patriarchal mode of production in the household, the patriarchal relations in paid work, and the patriarchal relations in cultural institutions. Therefore, this chapter, the researcher will examine and analyze these structures of patriarchy that are presented through the life of female characters in *Mulan*.

4.1.1 The Patriarchal Mode of Production in the Household

In *Theorizing Patriarchy*, Walby mentioned that the household is the central place where women live and work. Females are confined to a variety of household chores. Consequently, a typical production relationship in the household emerges in which the husband is the breadwinner, and the wife is the homemaker. The

family of Hua Mulan in the film presents this structure of patriarchy through the relationship between the mother, daughters, and the father.

In the film, many scenes show women are restricted in the household. Hua Mulan's hometown is in the amphitheater of a circular clay building. Hundreds of families who live in this clay building have thrived here for generations. Among the hundreds of families, Hua Mulan, Hua Mulan's mother, and many other women living in this clay building, do all the housework and childcare. With the exception of Hua Mulan, they seem to never leave the clay building. Furthermore, in terms of the life trajectory of the character of Hua Mulan's mother, in all the scenes she had never left the house. Every day, she was either cooking or caring for her children and husband. Another example is Hua Mulan's sister, Xiu. She had never left home since she was a child. She was educated from a young age to work hard, to be filial to her parents, and to be a good wife. Both of their examples reveal that the center of women's lives always revolves on their families. Women are confined to the household, which also establishes the subordinate position of women. It can be imagined that if Hua Mulan had not replaced her father to join the army, she would have spent her whole life living here just like her mother, sister and all the women in the clay building. This is a clear presentation of the patriarchal model in which females are constrained to work in the household. They are required to repeat monotonous household work year after year.

Moreover, Walby (1990) explains that female labor in production relations between the genders is largely expropriated by the household because of reproduction. Walby describes Firestone's argument that "reproduction is the basis of women's subordination by men." This is because female reproduction is not an instantaneous act, but a long-term and evolving process. It covers pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, and child-rearing, etc. Hua Mulan's mother is a good example. As a wife, she cooked and did housework around the house every day. When Hua Mulan's father decided to go to the battlefield, she wept with sadness, fearing that he would never come back if he did leave. As a mother, she worried every day about Hua Mulan's different behaviors from the other girls in the village. When Hua Mulan and Hua

Mulan's sister grew up, she still worried about whether they would find a good husband. Her life always seems to revolve around her husband and children. There is no mention or concern about herself, her preferences, or her dreams. In the film, she doesn't even have a name. Instead, she is known as Hua Mulan's mother or Hua Zhou's wife. The life experience of Hua Mulan's can be seen as the life of a traditional woman. It was generally believed that a woman when she became a wife, would be expected to reproduce.

Women are expected to do the household chores, but they are also expected to birth and raise children. However, this process of reproduction will take up almost all of their time and experience. Once a woman becomes a mother, it is almost impossible for her to have a life outside the household. This is because her job is not only to complete household work but also to look after her children growing up at home. However, we can imagine that a person who has worked hard at home for more than a decade or decades has probably formed a habit already. This habit also made her unable and no longer have enough courage to go outside her household. Therefore, there is a typical productive relationship in the household, where the husband is the breadwinner and the wife is the homemaker. Women are confined to household chores and reproduction. On the other hand, the male is the one who earns the money to support the family.

4.1.2 The Patriarchal Relations within Paid Work

Differential treatment between men and women is manifested in patriarchal relationships with paid work. This is reflected in the differences between men and women in terms of payment and types of work (Walby, p. 25). And, Walby (1990) describes Hakim's argument that "Women are not only concentrated in the lower grades of work (vertical segregation) but also in different areas of work (horizontal segregation)." That is, women are in a position of greater inequality than men in paid work.

Men and women are distinctly working in different occupations and industries. Typically, women are expected to stay at home constantly to look after

children, husbands, and the elders. As a result, the majority of women's work is concentrated in the household and not in the outside. While the men, with the responsibility of providing for their families, are expected to work outside. In the film, except for Hua Mulan and the witch, Hua Mulan's mother and sister and all other women are portrayed as traditionally docile females. The daily works of women are either doing housework or caring for their husbands and children.

Women are restricted from participating in work occupations outside of the household. In the film, Hua Mulan has to hide her female body by wearing male clothes and changing her name to Hua Jun (Flower Army) in order to be able to join the army. This is because the military is a male-only occupation in which women are completely excluded. When Hua Mulan first joined the military camp for training, the general read out the following four strict rules: "stealing, penalty, death; desertion, penalty, death; bring women into camp or consorting with women in any way, penalty, death; dishonesty, penalty, expulsion." The general's words indicates that women are not allowed to be brought into the military camps. Moreover, even if a woman has the same or exceeded abilities to do the same job as a man, she will be treated differently. Since Hua Mulan was a child, she had a different talent from ordinary people, which was called "Qi" in the film, but "Qi" was seen as an ominous energy for women. Therefore, Hua Mulan' father told Hua Mulan that "Qi belongs to the warriors, not to the daughters. Soon you will be a young woman. Hide your talent until you can whisper and bring glory to your family" The words were said to Hua Mulan by her father, who was worried that Hua Mulan might be misunderstood as a witch when she shows her "Qi" in front of the neighbors. Therefore, when Hua Mulan entered the military as a soldier, she was very careful to hide her "Qi." She tried not to be discovered by her comrades as much as possible, because she had been taught by her father that as a woman she should not have "Qi." However, when General Dong found out that Hua Mulan had "Qi", he was very excited and appreciative, and even decided to marry his daughter to Mulan on the spot. This appreciation, however, was for Hua Jun (as a male identity), not Hua Mulan (as a female identity). The director has captured this scene in great detail. It fully

conveys the fact that Hua Mulan, as the possessor of “Qi”, is not supposed to be there. Because “Qi” belongs to the warriors, and the warriors belong exclusively to men. The examples of Hua Mulan reveal that the female in *Mulan* are in a restricted situation in paid work.

In addition, even when women are allowed to work in paid employment, they are treated differently and placed in worse jobs than men. The experience of the witch is able to show how women are treated differently in paid work. In *Mulan* (2020), Xianniang, with her powerful magic, was regarded as a weapon by Khan, the emperor of the Rouran army. When the Khan and the other Rouran generals were discussing how to attack Central China, all the Rouran generals despised Xianniang’s abilities. They even said that they did not want to work with Xianniang. As a powerful witch, she became angry at being so underestimated, for she had always wanted to be a warrior. Therefore, at the end of the meeting when the Khan said contemptuously that “You have proved useful, witch”, she attacked the Khan by putting her hand around the Khan’s neck and threatening him that “Not witch, warrior.” Then Khan said to Xianniang:

Remember what you want [...] a place where your powers will not be vilified. A place where you are accepted for who you are. You won't get what you want without me. When I found you on a desert steppe wandering alone [...] you were exiled, a seorned dog. When I sit on the throne, that dog will have a home.

From the dialog above, the Khan called her “a seorned dog.” He never saw Xianniang as a warrior but only as a weapon to help him achieve his goals. The other Generals also did not accept her, even though she had very powerful abilities. Therefore, she was very eager to be accepted as a warrior. However, she was not finally accepted either. Thus, she decided to sacrifice herself by helping Mulan. It was imaginable that if Xianniang helped the Khan to be victorious, that she would not really be treated as a warrior. The most she could have been given a home and she would have turned from a homeless dog to a dog with a home. She never succeeded because the society was still male dominated.

Although as powerful as the witch, she is still not accepted by the people. The main reason is not because she is a witch, but because she, as a woman, is not allowed to have such great power. Even though the movie does not present the witch's experience before she works for Khan, it is known from Khan's statements that she is ostracized by the people from the village and become homeless. Because the workplace for women is the household and they are required to take homemaker role. According to the concepts of patriarchy, a woman's ability to work with anything besides her family is not expected. However, Xianniang's ability is obviously not what a traditional woman should has. Therefore, she is regarded as a witch and is excluded and homeless. This is also why Hua Mulan's father repeatedly told Mulan never to show her power "Qi", which would make her be seen as a witch.

These examples from the film present the unequal treatment of men and women in paid work. It is clear that men have an absolute advantage, while women are discriminated and oppressed. The treatment of the witch receive from the male characters also shows that it is difficult for women to get the equal treatment as men in paid work, even if they are very capable and powerful enough to do the same woks as men.

4.1.3 The Patriarchal Relations in Culture

As mentioned in the earlier paragraph, the patriarchal relations in cultural institutions refer to a variety of institutions including media, religion and education that support the notion that a woman's place is in the home and reinforced gender stereotype. Walby's concepts of patriarchy are applied to prove that there is a patriarchal aspect on the presentation of female characters in *Mulan* (2020). The findings shows that there is one main area in which women are under the control of men, which is the patriarchal relations in cultural institutions. Walby states that religion and education constantly conveyed patriarchal ideas and implied the subordination of women, which eventually contributed to the valuation of masculinity over femininity (Walby, 1990, pp. 90-102). Therefore, education and religion are regarded as very

important factors that form the distinction between masculinity and femininity (Walby, 1990, p. 91).

Religion is an authoritative source of justification for the subordination of women (Walby, 1990, p. 101). As one of the most influential beliefs in the history of Chinese culture, Confucianism has had a profound influence on Chinese culture for thousands of years (Edfelt, 2009; Littlejohn, 2017; Zhang & Liu, 2012). As Littlejohn (2017) mentioned that Confucianism “became essential to the Chinese educational system and to students seeking government positions for the next 2,000 years” In the film, Confucianism, as a source of authority in Chinese culture, attests to the subordination of women in a patriarchal Chinese culture, which reflects how Hua Mulan is presented. In the film, the subordination of women is shown in Hua Mulan, Hua Mulan’s sister and the mother and the witch. This subordination cannot be separated from the Confucian ideological indoctrination.

The subordination of women in China was directly influenced by the Confucian education of women’s “virtue” and “conduct.” Women were taught to be subservient to men, which continued for generations. Confucianism has conservative rules for women in the form of the “three obediences and four virtues” (Chang, 2020; Jirong, 2006). It is considered to be the most important ideological restraints for Chinese women. The “three obediences” mean that women should be obedient to their fathers before marriage, to their husbands after marriage, and to their sons after the death of their husbands. At that time, the criterion of whether a woman was good or not was obedience. The “four virtues” are morality, proper speaking, modesty in manners, and diligence in needlework (Chang, 2020; Jirong, 2006; L. Wang, Han, & Xu, 2020; Zhengyang Gong, 2021).

In *Mulan* (2020), Hua Mulan’s mother and sister were presented as the traditional female characters who followed the teachings of Confucianism, especially the role of the mother who was presented as a “perfect” traditional wife. She worked hard in household and cared for her children. The most importantly, she completely obeyed her husband which showed in her behavior toward him such as standing behind or barely

paying attention to herself. Even on the issue of Hua Mulan's education, the mother only spoke quietly to the father about her worries, and it was the father who actually educated Hua Mulan. Therefore, her character reflects what Walby (1990, p. 91) mentions in her book that women are brainwashed into passivity and acquiescence.

Another example of the presentation of the subordinate position of women by the education of Confucianism is the character of Hua Mulan's sister (Xiu). In the film, the director has created a very brave Hua Mulan who is different from other girls and even a bit "naughty" since she was a child. At the same time, the director also portrayed Xiu (Hua Mulan's sister) who contrasted greatly with Hua Mulan's image. Xiu was very gentle and obedient as a perfect daughter (Putri, Ayusya, & Barus, 2022). Her parents never worried about her since she was a little girl. When Hua Mulan was ridiculed by the neighbors for chasing chickens to the roof, her mother said to her father "Xiu gives me no trouble. The matchmaker will find a good husband for her. It is Mulan I worry about" Through the conflict image of a traditional woman and the image of a rebellious woman between Hua Mulan and Xiu, the subordinate position of woman like Xiu was highlighted through the different opinions of Hua Mulan's mother toward her daughters.

Furthermore, Confucian culture emphasizes the importance of marriage to a woman (Chang, 2020; Jirong, 2006; Z. Tang, 1995). This idea is also presented in the film. When Hua Mulan was a young woman, she came home and was told that the match maker had found a match for her. Although she was a little disappointed, she still agreed to this arrangement and learned the etiquette of being a good wife from a matchmaker. This scene showed that women are without freedom to make their own choices on marriage and life. When a woman is born, her whole life seems to be invisibly manipulated. What she needs to do and what she cannot do is dictated. Hua Mulan put on her make-up before going to see the matchmaker and received praise from her father. The reaction from her father reflects how the society valued women. However, for Mulan and other women, the thick makeup is like a mask that is functioned as for hiding women's emotion or their true self. After she met the matchmaker, the matchmaker told

Hua Mulan that one of the most important qualities of a good wife is to serve her husband attentively. When a girl becomes a wife, her greatest job is to serve her husband, and the elders in the family (Putri et al., 2022). It is evident that in marriage, the female is the one serving, while the male is the one enjoying the service (Wong, 2013). In addition, the matchmaker also taught Mulan that the qualities of a good wife are quiet, composed, graceful, poised, and polite. This is similar to the “four virtues” of Confucianism that women should observe. The most significant aspect of Confucianism’s education for women is to be submissive and become a good wife. Therefore, the teaching of the matchmaker reflects the subordination of women to men.

However, the film reveals an attempt to challenge the notion of the patriarchal relations in cultural institutions through the portrayal of Hua Mulan and Xianniang who refuse the traditional roles as the obedient daughter or the docile wife according to the teachings of Confucianism. In order to undermine this patriarchal culture, Hua Mulan is portrayed as a challenge to the teachings of Confucianism through her refusal to be an obedient daughter by abandoning her duty as a daughter and enlisting to be a warrior in the army.

Walby (1990) mentions that femininity defines women as confined within the family. Therefore, she suggests that the core of changing the oppression and restrictions imposed on women by femininity is to break the abstinence of paid work from women (p. 108). In the film, the challenges to the abstinence of paid work of Hua Mulan and Xianniang are embodied in the finding of their “place.” When Mulan was young, her father always taught her to be clear about her “place.” As he said that “Your job is to bring honor to the family.” How can a girl bring honor to her family? Hua Mulan’s mother gave the answer that “A daughter brings honor through marriage.” This means that a traditional woman’s “place” is centered around marriage and the family. However, Hua Mulan undermines the tradition place of woman by becoming a warrior, a job reserved for man only.

The process of Mulan’s finding her true “place” or the process of identifying herself as a warrior is also a process of constantly challenging the abstinence

of paid work for women. In the first battle between Hua Mulan and Xianniang, Xianniang asks Hua Mulan who she is. Hua Mulan's answer is "I am Huajun, the soldier of the emperor's imperial army." In this time, Hua Mulan is not facing to Xianniang as her true female identity, but as a male identity Hua Jun. Her uncertainty about her true "place" makes her unable to release her greatest energy "Qi" so that she did not defeat the Xianniang. Hua Mulan's uncertainty about her position also reflects the patriarchal culture that deeply influence women and their behavior. Because, according to the Confucian teachings, the warrior identity is completely isolated from women. In this battle, she learned that in order to defeat the enemy, she needed to face her female identity and clarify her true "place." Therefore, although she knew what kind of punishment she will face, she still wanted to confess who she was when she heard that the emperor would be killed by the Khan. She came to the military camp with a female identity. Her female identity completely shocked everyone, and General Dong even had to expel her from the army according to military regulations.

In the end, Hua Mulan saved many soldiers and repelled the enemy army by herself. Her bravery earned the trust of her comrades. One of her comrades Hong Hui said that Mulan "risked everything by revealing her true identity. She's the best warrior amongst us. I believe Hua Mulan." And then Commander Dong also said to Mulan "Hua Mulan, your actions have brought disgrace and dishonor to this regiment, to this kingdom, and to your own family. But your loyalty and bravery are without question." From the above dialogues, even though Hua Mulan is able to break the traditional role of female and be a warrior, her action is still condemned by men. The Commander's praise still reinforces the Confucian teachings. Furthermore, her action is accepted only because she is "loyal" to the kingdom, unlike the other female character, Xianniang who is rejected by the patriarchal society due to her deviance characteristic from the traditional woman's behavior.

Xianniang, the witch, always wanted to be a warrior and wanted to be accepted by others, especially men. Therefore, when Khan called her a witch, she angrily choked him and said "It's the warrior." Even when she sat on the seat of the

emperor, she was the only one alone in the middle of the vast palace. Her tragedy lies in this seeking but not receiving. That's why she decided to help Hua Mulan when she saw that Mulan could gain the trust of the soldiers. She kept guiding Hua Mulan to face her power, remove the male violation and be her true self. Her death in defending Hua Mulan from arrows brings her tragedy to a climax. Both women, Hua Mulan and the witch, who also challenge the patriarchal culture, have very different endings with Hua Mulan being praised and the witch dying with regret. The witch can be seen as the struggle of a woman to undermine the stereotype of a woman. Unlike Hua Mulan who still presented as an obedient girl who serves for the benefit of the male, the witch seeks to destroy the male's power. It is the reason why she has to die. The rebellion has to die, and the good girl lives.

Although the witch eventually died, however, she also inspired Hua Mulan to realize the value of women. From being a woman constrained to the household, Hua Mulan eventually grows into a warrior, a successful female to challenge the patriarchy. It also proves that Walby (1990) states a progress from "private patriarchy" to "public patriarchy" (pp. 178-185). Private patriarchy is a form that "based upon household production, with a patriarch controlling women individually and directly in the relatively private sphere of the home" (Walby, 1990, p. 178). Public patriarchy is a form that "women have access to both public and private arenas" (Walby, 1990, p. 178). This means that women will no longer be barred from the public arenas, but will be subordinate within them. The film portrays Hua Mulan as a female character who challenges patriarchy. She is finally accepted and celebrated as a warrior. Instead of being confined to the private sphere of the family, Hua Mulan becomes a warrior in the public sphere. This is not only a change in a woman's identity, but also a challenge to the ingrained patriarchy and a progress from "private patriarchy" to "public patriarchy." Although this progress is slight, it will inspire more women to realize their value and to change the inequitable patriarchal system.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study was a study of Disney's film *Mulan* (2020). The female characters in *Mulan* (2020) showed that there was an asymmetrical gender relationship that women were oppressed in a male-dominated system. There was also a comparison of other studies with *Mulan* (2020), which would be a reference for future studies.

Conclusion

This study had examined the presentation of female characters from the Disney's film *Mulan* (2020) through the lens of patriarchy. Findings showed that women were oppressed in a male-dominated system. In the film, the female characters such as Hua Mulan's mother and Hua Mulan's sister and all other women in the village were portrayed as traditionally docile females who were oppressed by male-domination. Under the oppression of women on patriarchy system, women were educated to be submissive and virtuous. They were expected to take responsibility for caring their families without pay. As the main female characters Hua Mulan and Xianniang were portrayed as extremely brave to challenge the patriarchy. Their courage to pursue becoming a warrior reflected the feminist spirit.

The result also proved that there were three patriarchy concepts as outlined in Sylvia Walby's book *Theorizing Patriarchy* in the film which are the patriarchal mode of production in household, the patriarchal relations within paid work, and the patriarchal relations in cultural institutions. Under these patriarchy aspects, there was an asymmetrical gender relationship that women were oppressed in a male-dominated system.

As mentioned in the earlier paragraph, there was a typical patriarchal mode of production in household in *Mulan* (2020) that the male took the breadwinner role while the female took the homemaker role. Females were confined to a variety of household chores and were dominated by males (Cunningham, 2008). Hua Mulan's mother, Hua Mulan's father, and Hua Mulan's sister were presented the patriarchal mode. Hua

Mulan's mother and sister were the typical women who are required to do the household, especially the mother was presented to serve her family. Hua Mulan's father was the one to earn money out of the family. Moreover, female reproduction was seen as the basis of the male domination of female. The long-term process of reproduction made women to have a subordinated position.

In the patriarchal relations within paid work and the culture which were the male-dominated system, the female characters were always in a subordinate position due to the concept of reproduction and the education of religions. This subordinate position was revealed through the presentation of Hua Mulan's mother and Hua Mulan's sister. They were the typical traditional female characters who were educated to be a good daughter and a good wife according to Confucianism which was the most influential and authoritative religion in China. According to the education of Confucianism, the most important element of a good daughter and a good wife was obedience. As a daughter, one had to be obedient to her parents, and as a wife, one had to be obedient to her husband, thus creating passive and obedient femininity. For example, Hua Mulan's mother was presented to be obedient to Hua Mulan's father that she always followed the decisions of Hua Mulan's father without any opposition. Hua Mulan's sister was portrayed to be obedient to her parents' education. She listened to her parents to learn how to be a good wife. Moreover, they were confined to the household and were not allowed to do paid work. This also reflected the oppressed and confined situation of women which has continued for many generations. As Walby (1990) states the "authoritative belief system which justifies the mutilation of women, has a similar place in her scheme" (p. 110).

Hua Mulan and Xianniang were portrayed as a challenge to the concept of patriarchy. Xianniang pursued her dream of becoming a warrior boldly. She left her home-production life and worked with men such as Khan, although she was rejected. Her experience of pursuing her dream was a challenge to male domination. Furthermore, from being a woman constrained to the household, Hua Mulan eventually grew into a warrior, a successful female to challenge the patriarchy. Hua Mulan was no

longer submissive or passive in the relationship with men. She was portrayed as a “superwoman” to lead the army to the ultimate victory. Her success indicated a significant challenge to patriarchy by breaking the abstinence of women in paid work. It also greatly inspired women to be brave enough to find their self-worth and no longer be confined to private sphere.

In *Theorizing Patriarchy*, Walby points out the importance of breaking this abstinence of women from paid work. Throughout the development of feminism, the first important step is the change from “private patriarchy” to “public patriarchy.” Therefore, Hua Mulan’s transformation from a woman confined to the private sphere of the family to a “warrior” in the public sphere is not only a change in female identity, but also the initial progress of feminism (Walby, 1990, pp. 178-185). Although the slight success of Hua Mulan will not completely change the subordinate position of women, it will inspire more women to be aware of their own values. It also has great significance in changing this unequal subordination.

Discussions

The study of the presentation of female characters in Disney’s film *Mulan* (2020) showed that there was a stronger emphasis on the male-domination of female in the patriarchy in *Mulan* (2020). Under the patriarchal system, women were oppressed and dominated (T. Chen, 2017; C. Li, 2002; Walby, 1990). The images of the female characters in live-action film *Mulan* (2020) were portrayed to challenge this patriarchal system. Therefore, in addition to reshaping the new version of female heroic role of Hua Mulan that broke from the traditional image of “a good girl”, a brand-new role of the witch Xianniang had also been created. This made the film filled with a more powerful message concerning about feminist power (Zhengyang Gong, 2021).

Many studies on the Hua Mulan story presented a heroic image of the resourceful, brave, and powerful Hua Mulan. Therefore, Hua Mulan was given many titles in these studies such as “feminist warrior” (Zhengyang Gong, 2021), “intuitive strategist” (Yin, 2011), and “China’s savior” (Putri et al., 2022). Hua Mulan in this study was preferred to be a combination of “feminist warrior” and “superwoman.” As a woman,

she did not confine herself to the household as traditional women did, but led the army to defeat the Rouran army, saved the emperor, and finally won the battle. It demonstrated that she was a “feminist warrior.” Meanwhile, she was invested with a very powerful energy “Qi” in *Mulan* (2020), which made her stand out from other women and made her character filled with heroism (Kaicheng & Yuquan, 2021). As Kaicheng and Yuquan (2021) mentioned that “Mulan becomes a wizardly woman who defeats the Rouran khan alone, which magnifies Mulan’s personal role” The experience of Mulan becoming a warrior and leading her army to victory presented a strong sense of personal heroism in *Mulan* (2020).

This kind of personal heroism had been proposed in many studies as a borrowing or rewriting of Chinese culture by the United States or the Western world. As Yin (2011) motioned that “Chinese cultural values were selectively disposed and replaced with Western ideologies” Both the Mulan in the Disney animation or the live-action movie showed Mulan’s exploration of self-worth (Kaicheng & Yuquan, 2021; Negara, 2021). This was different from the Chinese version movie *Hua Mulan* (2009) (X. Chen, 2018; J. Tang, 2008; Yang, 2018; Yin, 2011). In Disney versions, although Hua Mulan’s army was at a disadvantage of being outnumbered, Mulan created an avalanche and led the army to win the final victory. However, Hua Mulan in the Chinese version was more like an ordinary person (Jinhua Li, 2014). As presented in one of the most famous film *Rise of a Warrior* (2009), Hua Mulan had no superpowers. She was known as a general through the brutally experience of fighting brutally again and again. She hated war, which was different from the Disney’s film *Mulan* (2020), where Mulan was seemed to choose war.

In addition, finding of the study of the presentation of female characters in Disney’s film *Mulan* (2020) showed that Confucianism as one of the most influential beliefs educated women to be obedient and filial (Walby, 1990, p. 101). It could be explained as two very important points in Chinese culture, which were filial piety and loyalty (Christina & Suprajitno, 2014; Yang, 2018). Filial piety and loyalty were seen as virtues in Chinese culture, but they were also seen as an oppression of women. Because

in the patriarchal society, filial piety meant obedience to parents, while loyalty usually meant obedience to the emperor and the rulers. That is, women were oppressed and dominated within the control of men (Christina & Suprajitno, 2014; Yin, 2011). The findings of this study showed similarity to many previous studies that there was a traditional male domination culture in Mulan story (Astuti, 2015; Ding, 2014; Edwards, 2010; Jing Li, 2018; Mo, 2015; Negara, 2021; M. Xu & Tian, 2013).

In addition, the findings of this study are in line with some previous studies about the film *Mulan* 2020. According to Lailawati, Hutahaeen, Islami, and Nursafira (2020), there is a gender injustice through patriarchy, in which “the domination of men over women has become a social reality” (p. 73). In addition, the researchers points out that the film *Mulan* (2020) is a disappointing film from a feminist point of view. It is because that the film *Mulan* (2020) “does not challenge the patriarchy, but rather enforces it even worse” (p. 75). What’s more, this study also compares the anime film with the live action film and shows that the Mulan character fails in both films against patriarchy. The former because the ending is chosen for the role of a daughter, and the latter because as powerful as she is, she is always in the service of men (p. 75). In the study of Zhengyang Gong (2021), there is a strong sense of feminism in the film *Mulan* (2020). This study has shown that female characters in the film, such as Hua Mulan’s mother, Hua Mulan’s sister are in a vulnerable position in society. The study also highlights Hua Mulan as a female warrior that “she not only fights for herself, but also for women. At the same time, she even fights to rescue men trapped in the framework of patriarchy” (p.73).

With the development of feminism, more and more works such as novels, television and movies have presented feminist interpretations. The story of Mulan has been continuously brought to the screen with its own unique characteristics. Disney’s film *Mulan* (2020) is the latest portrayal of the story of Mulan is considered a feminist film. The things of this study showed that Hua Mulan went against what she should has done as a female responsibility in the family by obeying her parents, marrying a good husband, but not going to join the army to become a warrior. However, compared to

many works about Mulan, the version of *Mulan* (2020) had a great change in the end. Instead of returning to her family, Hua Mulan became a real soldier after coming back home to look at her family from the hint of the end of film. This showed that Hua Mulan's challenge to the patriarchy was successful, even if this success was very slight.

Therefore, the character of Hua Mulan as a "warrior" in the film *Mulan* (2020) might inspire more women to fight for their own rights. However, some studies pointed out that Hua Mulan's challenge to the patriarchy was unsuccessful that she still obeyed the control of men (Kaicheng & Yuquan, 2021; Lailawati et al., 2020). Even though Hua Mulan chose to accept the emperor's appointment as a soldier at the end, she was still submissive for she was still under male domination. Even as powerful as Mulan, she still needed to serve men. Just as she persuaded the witch to go with her to save the emperor in the movie, she finally found her place as a warrior to serve the emperor. She said to Xiangniang that "You can still take the noble path" What was the noble path? This answer was to show your loyalty to the emperor and to start serving men as a warrior.

As mentioned in the earlier paragraph that Hua Mulan still presents as an obedient girl who serves for the benefit of the male. Therefore, it can be concluded that Hua Mulan's success in getting emancipated from the private to the public sphere (patriarchy) is superficial and incomplete (Walby, 1990, p. 178).

This can correspond to the development of feminism today, which is superficial and incomplete. Nowadays, as feminist movement continues to thrive, women are not only restricted to work in the household. They have more rights to do what they want to do, such as the right to reproductive freedom and the right to abortion. However, with such rights, women are still a vulnerable group in today's society. For example, women and men are treated differently in the workplace. Some pregnant female employees may also receive discrimination and unfair treatment in the workplace. In addition, some extremely important state leaders and entrepreneurs are still mostly male-dominated. Therefore, by investigating Mulan film, it does not only provides insight into how women are oppressed and restricted, but it also helps to raise awareness of the position of women in the patriarchal society and today's society.

Recommendations for Further Studies

Since this study used only one film for textual analysis, further studies could expand on this current study by comparing and analyzing the production of Mulan from the American perspective and the Chinese perspective. Moreover, further studies could analyze the presentation of female characters in film from other cultural context besides China. The presentation of female characters in films from multi-country would shed further light on the impact of the patriarchal relations in cultural institutions on woman from different cultural context.



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VITA

NAME CHENGHUI SHEN

DATE OF BIRTH 04 JUNE 1994

PLACE OF BIRTH GUIZHOU CHINA

INSTITUTIONS ATTENDED 2017 Bachelor of Art (Teaching Chinese to Speakers of
Other Languages)
From Guizhou Education College

HOME ADDRESS 646 Petchkasem Road, Bang Wa, Phasi Charoen,
Bangkok 10160

