

2. MULAN'S DEFIANCE AND HER LIBERATION

This chapter will be divided into two main parts. In the first part, I will analyze the expected gender roles that society expects Mulan to fulfill and Mulan's actions that are inconsistent with these roles, showing how traditional norms in ancient China dictate women's roles within their family and community. In the second part, I will analyze the ways Mulan liberates herself as ways to prove herself and others. Her decisions will enable her to exercise her agency and embrace her feminine and masculine traits.

2.1 Mulan's defiance of the expected gender roles.

In this subchapter, I will analyze how Mulan is expected to act, speak, and dress within society. I will first analyze the expected gender roles that Mulan is asked to fulfill and compare it with Mulan's actions, including the ways she speaks and dresses which are inconsistent with the expected gender roles that are placed upon her. Specific characteristics are expected from the society of Mulan as a woman, especially within the Chinese community where Mulan lives. Mulan's mother, father, and the matchmaker share the exact expectations about how a woman and a man should act differently. These shared expectations exist because of the overall concept of gender roles, which refers to the standard expectations assigned to individuals (such as men and women) based on their social position or membership in a specific social group (Eagly et al., 2004). Mulan's social group evolved within traditional Chinese norms, where men are more valued than women, and the younger ones are expected to show deep respect for their family, especially towards the elders. As a woman, Mulan is expected to fulfill traditional female roles, such as homemaker and caretaker of children (Eagly et al., 2004). Mulan's actions are inconsistent with conventional gender roles for women. Thus, this part will discuss the shared expectations that Mulan receives from society, namely, the matchmaker, her mother, and her father. These 3 people share the same values of the traditional value.

The matchmaker is one of the people within Mulan's society who has high expectation for women to follow the traditional norms. A matchmaker's role is to facilitate a successful marriage arrangement, serving as a bridge between the two families to ensure the arrangement is successful. In Mulan's era, it was a common practice to consult a matchmaker, as it is believed that doing so

would help unite two families of equal standing and boost their family status. In other words, by going to the matchmaker and marrying the man that was chosen for her, Mulan could bring honor to her family. In the meeting, the matchmaker explicitly highlights the qualities that are expected from a "good wife,"

MATCHMAKER: Quiet. Composed. Graceful. Elegant. Poised. Polite. These are the qualities...we see in a good wife. These are the qualities... we see in Mulan.

16:32 - 17:02

This scene deeply highlights the values expected from a woman, they must be "*Quiet. Composed. Graceful. Elegant. Poised. Polite*". The values or expectations placed upon Mulan by the matchmaker reflect the two principles established by Ban Zhao, namely, womanly virtue and womanly speech. These principles require women to uphold strong moral values, be diligent in household tasks, and speak only when appropriate. Quoted from Ban Zhao (1999) a woman must "guard carefully her chastity, to control circumspectly her behavior, in every motion, to exhibit modesty, and to model each act on the best usage". Whereas In Ban Zhao's womanly speech, she mentioned that a woman must "Speak at appropriate times and not to be offensive to others, may be called womanly speech." (Admonitions For Women, Ban Zhao, 1999). These two virtues align with the matchmaker values of a good woman. To become a 'good woman,' a woman must behave carefully, show modesty, and follow the best examples of a good woman's behavior while avoiding vulgar words and carefully handling their choice of words.

The matchmaker's words highlight the traditional expectation that women should be submissive and domestic, by serving their husbands.

MATCHMAKER: When a wife serves her husband...she must be silent. She must be... invisible.

17:04 - 17:18

These words highlight how men are regarded as the dominant figures while women are expected to assume subservient roles. This aligns well with the social expectations that Eagly has mentioned, where men are more likely to be the family provider and head of the household. In contrast, women are more likely to assume traditional domestic roles, such as homemaker and caregiver to children (The Psychology of Gender, 2004). Furthermore, this scene highlights the expectation of Mulan's family to bring honor to their family by seeking a matchmaker for an arranged marriage, as well as

the expected behavior of women in her era. Women are expected to be good wives and serve their husband well by being demure, silent, invisible, and elegant.

This conversation between Mulan's parents highlights the societal expectations of gender roles influence their perspective of their daughter's worth and ability to bring honor to the family through marriage.

MULAN'S FATHER: Mulan is young. She's still learning how to control herself.

MULAN'S MOTHER: You make excuses for her. You forget, Mulan is a daughter, not a son. A daughter brings honor through marriage.

MULAN'S FATHER: Any man would be fortunate to marry either of our daughters. Including Mulan

MULAN'S MOTHER: (scoffs) I ask you, what man will want to marry a girl who flits around rooftops, chasing chickens? Xiu gives me no trouble. The matchmaker will find a good husband for her. It is Mulan I worry about. They'll call her a witch. It's time you talked to her.

03:54 - 04:40

This conversation between Mulan's father and mother illustrates how society's expectations of Mulan shape her mother's perception of what it means to be a good woman who can bring honor to the family. From this conversation, it can be seen that Mulan's father loves both daughters equally. He does not have a problem that both of his daughters have different characteristics, Mulan's masculine side is more dominant rather than her feminine side. While her little sister, Xiu is very feminine. He stated that "Any man would be fortunate to marry either of our daughters. Including Mulan." which shows that he did not really mind their different behaviors and characteristics because he loves both of them equally and that is what makes both individuals different. Mulan's mother is worried for Mulan, she is afraid that no man will take her as a wife because she does not possess the qualities that are described by the matchmaker. Mulan's mother often compares her with her little sister, Xiu. Xiu has all the expected qualities of a woman as described by the matchmaker, making her a perfect example of a 'good wife'. Mulan's mother reminding her husband comes from her worries, she reminds her husband that Mulan is a daughter, not a son, he needs to stop seeing Mulan as a son because Mulan can be called a witch for her actions that are not suitable for a woman. Mulan's mother also emphasizes that a daughter brings honor through marriage, because it is believed that when a daughter has deep respect for their

family, especially towards elders. It is a sign of respect towards the elders as a woman to bring honor to her family. Here her mother shows that she deeply upholds the Confucius value.

This narrative highlight Mulan's father is influence by his wife on the issue of Mulan's powerful *Chi* and the shared expectations from society. At first Mulan's father does not mind Mulan showing her *Chi*. He is proud that her daughter possesses *Chi* that is usually inherent by a warrior. *Chi* is a strong energy that flows within our body, and Mulan's *Chi* is considered as strong as a warrior's *Chi*. After the conversation with his wife, he realizes that Mulan's characteristics are more appropriate for a boy than a girl.

MULAN'S FATHER: Your chi is strong, Mulan. But chi is for warriors, not daughters. Soon, you'll be a young woman... and it is time for you... to hide your gift away. To...To silence its voice. I say this to protect you. That is my job. Your job is to bring honor to the family

05:30 - 06:08

As Mulan's father does not want Mulan to be ridiculed and called a witch he has to agree with his wife opinion. He then advises Mulan to hide her chi, which makes Mulan unable to voice her opinions on whether she wants to remain herself or follow the traditional norm. She is forced to be silent because her strength is deemed unsuitable for a woman. This is her father's form of his love for her, he is trying to protect her from the social consequences.

The shared expectations that Mulan is asked to fulfill. This conversation between Mulan, her mother, and father happened because the Emperor commands his citizens to join the army and prepare for war. Here Mulan tries to adapt to the shared expectations, but she failed to do so because Mulan is conflicted with her emotions and love for her father. Mulan is not favorable with the Emperor's command because her father's condition makes it impossible for him to join the army.

MULAN'S MOTHER: You're a war hero. You've already made many great sacrifices.

MULAN'S FATHER: Are you suggesting... Our family not comply with the Imperial edict?

MULAN: But how can you fight...

MULAN'S FATHER: I am the father. It is my place to bring honor to our family on the battlefield. You are the daughter! Learn your place.

20:50 - 21:20

Mulan's father is the only man in the family and he believes that it is his duty to protect the family and go to war. Mulan question her father because she cares for him and she is afraid of losing him. Mulan does not represent Ban Zhao's value, a scholar in the Confucius era, writes that a woman

should “choose her words with care, to avoid vulgar language, to speak at appropriate times, and not to be offensive to others may be called womanly speech”. Mulan questioning her father is considered offensive because it is a sensitive topic to be questioned. Although she chooses her words with care it still makes her father angry. Mulan’s father further emphasizes his role in the family so Mulan should know her place as a woman. That battlefield work or any other job that requires strength and skill is reserved for a man, while a woman's place is to uphold the family's honor through obedience and social conformity. Mulan's father's words deeply reflected on the patriarchal beliefs that dictate what is seen as appropriate behavior for men and women. By emphasizing that Mulan must "learn her place," her father silences her choice and perpetuates the social expectation that women should prioritize familial and social honor over personal fulfillment. At the end of the conversation, Mulan chooses to be silent. This act shows that Mulan respects her parents and she understands that if she protests further, her parents will be in a hard place if she does not confront her duty as a daughter. It is also a pretense so that her father will not suspect her plan to run away from home and replace her father’s place to go to war.

Through the explanation above, we can see the shared expectations from her environment. Mulan's actions and beliefs are contrary to the social expectations and the traditional gender roles of how a woman should act. Based on the matchmaker and her mother expectations, Mulan is expected to be “quiet, composed, graceful, elegant, poised, and polite”. Mulan does not possess all these qualities, as seen in figure 2.1 Mulan is running around the roof of the village to chase a chicken.



Figure 2.1 Mulan running around the roof chasing a chicken

Mulan is portrayed as a skilled, active, and adventurous young girl from a young age. Mulan is known to display traits such as agility and fearlessness naturally. Her traits are not something that is taught; they are a part of who she truly is. Her agility just comes naturally because she possesses a strong *Chi*. Mulan's actions are viewed as improper and unladylike. In Mulan's society, women are expected to be quiet, obedient, and graceful. Mulan does not have these qualities; she is not graceful but rather someone who fearlessly runs around the roof chasing chickens. As seen on figure 2.1 Mulan is portrayed as someone who makes trouble and it needs to be corrected so she can be a good woman. When she climbs on the roof the townspeople gather to see what is happening, when they see Mulan running around with the stick to guide the chicken back. The townspeople started to whisper and pointed at her actions.

Mulan's nature is also evident in the scene where she trains her chi in the open field with her father,



Figure 2.2 Young Mulan practicing her *Chi* with a bamboo stick



Figure 2.3 Young Mulan after practicing in secret with her father

As mentioned, Mulan's actions do not represent how a woman should behave because she possesses a powerful *Chi* that is usually associated with men. Mulan does not concern herself with the roles of how women are traditionally expected, instead she unconsciously defies them because she is just being true to herself. It is her nature. As seen in figure 2.2 and 2.3 Mulan enjoys practicing her *Chi* in secrecy early in the morning outside of her village, while her father is watching her with a proud smile. She is not like her sister who stays at home, serves their families, and exhibits restraint and passivity rather than assertiveness like Mulan.

Another scene that shows Mulan breaks away from the traditional norms is how a woman should speak. A woman is supposed to act quiet and composed, quoted from Ban Zhao (1999) she writes that a woman should "choose her words with care, to avoid vulgar language, to speak at appropriate times, and not to be offensive to others may be called womanly speech". This scene shows that Mulan is scolded for speaking out during the matchmaking meeting.

MATCHMAKER: Is something wrong?

MULAN: No, Madam Matchmaker. Thank you.

MATCHMAKER: It's ideal for the teapot to remain in the center of the table.

MULAN: Yes, I understand. But I think the teapot should remain where it is.

MATCHMAKER: Move the teapot. Girl!

17:24 - 17:50

Mulan's motive is to hide the spider on the table because her little sister is afraid of it. Mulan is trying to protect her little sister's image from the matchmaker. Despite the scolding she will receive

from the matchmaker, Mulan still adheres to her motif by not moving the teapot and expressing her opinions. This shows that Mulan loves her sister deeply, she is afraid her sister will panic and ends up being scolded by the matchmaker and her mother. So, she took the risk of moving the teapot to the side to hide the spider. The matchmaker is not pleased with Mulan's behaviors because the teapot's place is in the center of the table and she also voiced her opinion on why she thinks that the teapot should remain that way. The matchmaker's rebuke demonstrates that a woman is expected to obey rather than assert her opinions or take initiative, even if she believes it is the right thing to do.

Another characteristic that demonstrates how Mulan breaks away from her society's shared expectations is how she dresses. Within the traditional Chinese norms, women are expected to look clean, graceful, and modest. According to Ban Zhao, a woman must "wash and scrub dirt and grime, to keep clothes and ornaments fresh and clean, to wash the head and bathe the body regularly, and to keep the person free from disgraceful filth may be called a womanly appearance." (Admonitions For Women, Ban Zhao, 1999). This reflects that a woman's physical appearance should show elegance and presentability in Chinese society. Mulan challenges this ideal. She likes to wear loose clothing and pants unlike other women in her culture, who wear dresses and adorn themselves with jewelry.



Figure 2.4 Mulan riding her horse using simple attire

As seen in figure 2.4, Mulan prefers to wear loose pants and clothes because, since she is young, she loves being outdoors. Not only that, Mulan loves to ride her horse and explore out of her village. Despite her love for comfort clothing, Mulan is pressured to dress femininely so her appearance will look delicate.

In contrast to when she is being prepared to go to the matchmaker, Mulan is adorned in colorful makeup and clothing designed to make her appear gentle, elegant, and modest. This moment symbolizes the social expectations imposed on women, where appearance is judged based on the way they dress, and to fit within the shared expectations of others, women are forced to wear clothes that convey femininity.



Figure 2.5 Mulan on her way to the Matchmaker wearing a dress and adorned with makeup
While Mulan is adorned with makeup and dresses, Mulan looks uncomfortable and struggles to move comfortably in the traditional attire, as seen in this scene.



Figure 2.6 Mulan is uncomfortable wearing the dress
Mulan is also seen complaining to her mother because she could not eat to look pretty in the dress.

MULAN: I'm starving.

MULAN'S MOTHER: I already told you, you cannot eat. It will ruin your makeup.

MULAN: The fiercest winter storm could not destroy this makeup.

This scene further highlights that women must prioritize their appearance over their needs. When Mulan complains to her mother, by saying “I’m starving”. Her mother insists by saying “I already told you, you cannot eat. It will ruin your makeup”. In figure 2.5 we can see that Mulan wears heavy makeup and layers of clothing. If Mulan eats before going to the matchmaker it could ruin her mother’s hard work of putting make up on her face and another possibility is that her dress can be stained. Therefore, Mulan’s mother insists that she can not eat. Mulan’s preparation to visit the matchmaker highlights her duty as a daughter to look presentable and bring honor to her family.

From the explanation above, we can see that Mulan’s behaviour does not represent the values or expectations that society has voiced in contrast to her sister, Xiu. Xiu embraces the expectation of how a girl should behave. Xiu enjoys learning how to sew clothes, staying indoors to do chores, and following her mother’s wishes.



Figure 2.7 Xiu, Mulan’s sister is weaving

Xiu also feels comfortable in playing the expected role assigned to a woman. Here, Xiu conforms to one of the 4 virtues that Ban Zhao has mentioned. Womanly work, a good woman must “wholeheartedly devote to sewing and weaving, not to love gossip and silly laughter, in cleanliness and order [to prepare] the wine and food for serving guests may be called womanly work.” (Admonitions For Women, Ban Zhao, 1999). Ban Zhao believed that a good woman must be good at housework duties, such as weaving, sewing, preparing food, and others. From figure 2.7, Xiu is seen weaving, though it is not clearly seen it seems that she enjoys this work. Her mother is accompanying her and it can be seen that she is smiling because at least one of her daughters can conform to the traditional roles of a woman. From the two pictures, Figure 2.4 and Figure 2.7 it deeply illustrates

that the two sisters are the total opposite of each other. One adapts to the norms of gender roles while the other enjoys being true to herself. According to Murdock and Provost's (1973), in most societies, the work that needs to be done was carried out by both men and women, but never by both genders. Which leads to how an environment shapes people's perception regarding gender roles. Thus, a certain task or job is being associated with a certain gender, such as work that requires a masculine role will be given to men and work that requires individuals to be feminine will be given to women. In this case, Mulan's sister, Xiu, behaves well as a woman and is the 'perfect' example of a woman, Xiu is always seen in the house and doing house work with her mother. Whereas Mulan, she chooses to be true to herself and behave in a manner that is unladylike. Thus, Mulan's parents expected her to gain social approval by going to a matchmaker, dressing up, and marrying the man that the matchmaker chose. Although the two sisters act based on their own choices, they are very close and do not view their differences as a conflict or competition to become the favorite daughter. They both accept and support each other, showing that there is no one right or wrong. Both sisters are comfortable with who they are, proving that it is okay to make different choices.

Mulan receives verbal and non-verbal implications as a consequence for failing to meet the shared social expectations. The nonverbal consequences occur when she attracts commotion by chasing the chickens on the roof.



Figure 2.8 The villager threw disapproving glances toward Mulan's behavior
The action that Mulan did made the townspeople give her disapproving glances and gestures. This silent reaction that Mulan receives serves as a form of social punishment, reinforcing the idea that women must not climb on the rooftops and chase chickens, but women must behave well and act

graciously. This further reflects how society disciplines women through nonverbal actions, such as judging stares, which pressure them to fulfill the shared expectations of their society.

On the other hand, the verbal consequences that Mulan faces are more explicit because they harm her and tarnish her family's reputation.



Figure 2.9 Mulan was called out by the Matchmaker for failing the matchmaking test

MATCHMAKER: Dishonor to the Hua family. They have failed to raise a good daughter.

18:40 - 18:48

After the disastrous event with the matchmaker session, Mulan is publicly humiliated in front of the townspeople by the matchmaker. The statement above makes Mulan feel humiliated and the people around her glared at them and blames her family for not raising her well as a daughter. In Mulan's society, people around her value deeply regarding the roles of a woman and a daughter's job. A woman needs to respect their elders and bring honor to the family, and a daughter's failure is also seen as the failure of her family. This can be seen from the Confucious beliefs, as quoted from Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2020) "It is rare for a person who is filially pious to his parents and older siblings to be inclined to rebel against his superiors... Filial piety to parents and elder siblings may be considered the root of a person" (1.2). This emphasizes the importance of having deep respect for one's family, especially towards the elders. The behavior of the daughter reflects how their parents raise and educate them. Which reinforces the idea that a woman must be graceful and polite. A daughter mainly exists to uphold the family's reputation, because later they will live with their chosen husbands and become the caregiver of the family rather than expressing themselves.

Overall, Mulan has tried her best to conform to the shared expectations of the matchmaker, her mother, and her father. That a woman should be quiet, graceful, and elegant by not using her *Chi*, going to the matchmaker, adorning herself with makeup, and wearing a dress. However, Mulan's characteristics are very different from other women from a very young age. She is very agile, adventurous, and resilient. Therefore, Mulan's behavior is always seen as inappropriate due to her background, where Chinese traditions and patriarchal status are deeply valued. As a result, Mulan receives social consequences because of her agile nature, the townspeople begin to throw disapproving looks towards her, murmuring about her unlady-like behavior, and even embarrass her by calling out her inappropriate behavior. This indicates how her environment valued their cultural traditions and expected women to act demurely, stay silent, and dress appropriately which aligns well with the traditional gender roles where women are the caretaker of the family and the empath rather than the ones who should be dominant and powerful.

2.2 Mulan's ways to liberate herself from the expected gender roles.

In this subchapter, I will analyze Mulan's act of liberation from the shared expectation of traditional gender roles that society has given to Mulan. As a woman, Mulan is expected to conform to the shared expectations discussed above. However, she challenges those norms by exercising her agency, allowing her to take control of her own life and bring honor to her family. Mulan demonstrates her act of liberation by embracing both her feminine and masculine traits. Therefore, this part of the analysis will highlight how Mulan's action embodies gender role defiance, emphasizing the importance of self-determination in shaping one's identity.

2.2.1 Mulan's Assertion of her Agency

Mulan demonstrates her agency by taking control of her life and defying social expectations. In this part of the analysis, I will mainly use Giddens theory of agency. Giddens emphasizes that to have agency is to have the power to "act otherwise," which is "being able to intervene in the world or to refrain from such intervention, with the effect of influencing a specific process or state of affairs" (Giddens 1986, p. 14) and when talking about agency it always connects with power. It allows individuals to make a difference and have freedom in their life choices. Mulan has been

pressured by the expectations that dictate she fulfill her role within her environment. To escape those expectations, Mulan ran away from home and decided to embrace her *Chi*.

Despite being taught to suppress her *Chi*, Mulan's masquerade as a man allows her to show her warrior abilities to overcome the challenges she faces. Mulan's father taught her to suppress her *Chi* because he believed that her *Chi* was meant for a man and a warrior. But when Mulan ran away and masqueraded as a man, she seized this chance to master her warrior abilities (*Chi*) and overcome challenges.



Figure 2.10 Mulan masquerades herself as a man

COMMANDER: Your chi is powerful, Hua Jun. Why do you hide it?

MULAN: I... I don't know.

COMMANDER: The chi pervades the universe and all living things. We are all born with it. But only the most true will connect deeply to his chi...and become a great warrior.

47:06 - 47:49

This conversation reveals that Mulan is hesitant to use her *Chi* fully because Mulan is used to hiding her *Chi* ever since she was young, because when she does use her *Chi* it ends up disappointing her parents. Mulan's hesitation, "I... I don't know," reflects her conflicted mind; she is torn between embracing herself and burdening herself with her father's words to keep her *Chi* hidden. Mulan hides her *Chi* because she thinks it is the safest way to protect her family from society's judgement. Mulan has ruined their family image once by unleashing her *Chi* when she was young and it gained an unpleasant look from the townspeople. So, she tried to hide her *Chi* and confront the gender roles but it did not work. After the conversation with the commander, it made her realize that her

Chi is not something to be suppressed but rather something to be embraced. She was born with those powerful *Chi*, it is a gift that not many people receive easily. Mulan tries to embrace and accept her *Chi* during her training with the other soldiers.

The turning point of Mulan embracing her *Chi* fully is when her fellow comrades are in trouble during the battle. She decides to discard her male disguise and reveal her true identity to her comrades because she felt wrong for hiding her true self.



Figure 2.11 Mulan discard her disguise in the middle of war

Mulan's decision to finally reveal her true self as a woman is not just about removing her armor and letting down her hair. But it is a transformation that marks how she finally accepts and embraces herself fully without shame and burden. Mulan can easily continue her disguise as a man, but she consciously decides to stop hiding herself, even though she knows the risks and consequences. This shows that Mulan is finally taking control of her own life. Being true to herself is a solid proof that bravery is not just about physical strength, but it can come from within, even when there are consequences.

Mulan's encounter with the witch provides a deeper understanding of her agency, her rejection underscores her agency; she fights her beliefs. It shows how she stood in her own ground by rejecting the witch's powerful offer. The witch offers a path, suggesting that they are alike—both women with great power who were rejected by society.

MULAN: You follow a coward—a leader who runs from battle.

WITCH: Bori Khan did not run from battle. That coward will take the Imperial City... and your emperor will fall.

MULAN: That can't happen.

WITCH: But it happens even now. Join me. We will take our place together.

MULAN: I know my place and it is my duty... to fight for the kingdom and protect the emperor.

01:15:38 - 01:16:28



Figure 2.12 Mulan's conversation with the Witch

This dialogue further illustrates how Mulan is making her own choices and standing up for her own beliefs. This statement "I know my place and it is my duty... to fight for the kingdom and protect the emperor" shows that Mulan makes her own choices and she has control of the situation even though the Witch's offer is tempting. According to Giddens, agency is not just about having intentions but about having the power and capability to act on our own. Which proves Mulan's agency, she could have chosen to join the witch and seek revenge, but instead, she rejects the offer and consciously decides to fight for what she believes in: protecting the kingdom and the emperor.

2.2.2 Mulan's embracing both her feminine and masculine traits

Mulan's way of liberating her-self from the shared expectation includes embracing her feminine and masculine traits. In this part of the analysis, I will use the BSRI theory to support my discussion. BSRI or Bem Sex Inventory is a theory that measures the psychological gender traits between the Feminine and Masculine sides of an individual. Bem's scale was based on how masculine and feminine traits were seen desirable for men and women (The Measurement of masculinity, femininity, and neutral traits based on Bem's Sex Role Inventory, 1974). Mulan struggles to fulfill the shared expectations that society expects her to be, because her strength and bravery

are seen as masculine and not suitable for a woman. At the same time, gentleness and empathy are often associated with being feminine. Thus, as Mulan embraces both of her traits, it makes her realize that true strength is not always about being physically strong but it can be in the form of accepting her true self. Her ability to balance out her feminine and masculine traits allows her to break free from social constraints.

2.2.2.1 Mulan's embracing her Feminine traits

Mulan's feminine traits play a crucial role in her journey, demonstrating that strength is not limited to physical power only. Mulan exhibits 4 of the feminine traits from the BSRI table, which include affectionateness, sensitivity, compassion, and loyalty. Instead of viewing these traits as weaknesses, Mulan unconsciously embraces them, despite her resilient nature. Mulan uses them to inspire and support others. By embracing her feminine side, Mulan shows that true strength comes from the heart.

Mulan may appear strong and fearless, but she has a softer and affectionate side, especially toward her family. Here, Mulan protects her sister's image when a spider threatens to cause embarrassment,



Figure 2.13 Mulan save Xiu's image in front of the matchmaker

This small but meaningful act towards her sister demonstrates Mulan's deep care for her family and her prioritization of their well-being. It shows that her strength is not just about bravery in battle but also about protecting and supporting those you care about. This unconsciously reflects her nurturing and considerate nature, highlighting that femininity and strength can coexist. It challenges

the idea that being strong means being emotionless. Instead, Mulan shows that caring for others is a powerful strength.

Mulan's actions are driven by her compassion and selflessness, which are often seen as feminine traits. Which can be seen when she runs away from home to take her father's place.



Figure 2.14 Mulan ran away from home and take her father's place

This act is a powerful example of her deep love and loyalty towards her family. Mulan knows that her father's physical condition is not appropriate for battle, and sending him to war would likely lead to his death. Rather than watching him go, Mulan risks her own life to protect her father. This decision reflects her willingness to sacrifice her safety and happiness for those she loves. Mulan unconsciously embraces her feminine characteristics, proving that love and loyalty can be as powerful as being brave on the battlefield. This moment reveals that being affectionate and caring toward her family is a crucial aspect of her strength.

To add, Mulan's sensitivity toward others is another key aspect of her feminine traits, especially when it comes to her father,



Figure 2.15 Mulan being empathic and sensitive witnessing her father struggle

Mulan silently witnesses her father struggle with his sword. This showcases her profound empathy and emotional sensitivity. Mulan is not just observing, but she also feels his struggle and pain. Having empathy reflects her nurturing and considerate nature, a trait often associated with women. Mulan understands that her father is not the strong warrior he once was, yet he is willing to sacrifice for the family's honor. Instead of confronting him directly, Mulan only observes her father in silence. Her sensitivity reflects her ability to see beyond strength and pride, recognizing the emotional weight her father carries. This moment emphasizes that caring for others is not always about action, but it can also be about understanding and being an emotional support.

Another trait that Mulan shows is compassion and loyalty to others. Mulan's compassion and loyalty toward others are key aspects of her feminine side, which she fully embraces throughout her journey. This can be seen through her bond with her fellow soldiers during training,



Figure 2.16 Mulan reassuring her comrades despite her own fear

MULAN: My father once said... "There is no courage without fear."

FRIEND 2: So?

MULAN: So this is natural.

FRIEND 3: Well, it doesn't feel natural.

MULAN: Listen to me, all of you. We will live. I guarantee it. Because I will protect you, we'll protect each other. We'll fight for each other.

56:09 - 56:50

Despite disguising herself as a man, Mulan forms genuine bonds with her fellow soldiers. The conversation above shows that Mulan understands her friend's fear because she understands those feelings too. Her ability to reassure and comfort them despite her fear reflects her compassion and willingness to support one another in a difficult situation. Not only that, this also shows Mulan's loyalty towards her comrades. Mulan's promise to her friends, "We'll protect each other. We'll fight for each other," shows the sense of unity and care that Mulan have with her comrades. Which deepened the existing bond that she already has with her fellow comrades as they go on with their journey as a soldier.

Later, when Mulan reveals her true identity, her friends still stand by her side, even though she lies about her identity.



Figure 2.17 Mulan's comrades standing up for her

FRIEND 1: You would believe Hua Jun. Why do you not believe in Hua Mulan? She risked everything by revealing her true identity. She's braver than any man here. And she's the best warrior amongst us.

01:18:08 - 01:18:23

Here, we can see the profound bond that Mulan shares with her fellow soldier friends despite her deception. One soldier declares, "*She risked everything by revealing her true identity. She's braver than any man here.*" This shows their respect and loyalty for each other. Through these interactions, Mulan proves that embracing her feminine traits is as powerful as physical courage.

2.2.2.2 Mulan's embracing her Masculine Traits

Mulan's journey involves challenging traditional gender roles by embracing her masculine traits. Mulan embraces 4 of the traits that have been listed in the BSRI table, which include leadership, willingness to take risks, strong personality, and assertiveness, which are crucial to her growth and success. These traits set her apart in a patriarchal society that expects women to be obedient and submissive. Instead of conforming to these expectations, Mulan embraces these qualities to prove her worth as a warrior, ultimately earning respect and recognition.

Mulan's leadership is evident when she is expelled from the warriors. She returned to take action, leading them to the emperor's castle to stop the enemy.



Figure 2.18 Mulan leading a group of soldiers to defeat the enemy

COMMANDER: 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. You will lead us as we ride to the Imperial City. Ready the horses.

01:18:45 - 01:19:09

Despite being expelled by the commander, she does not retreat in shame; instead, she steps up and fulfills her duty to protect the kingdom. Her willingness to put honor and duty above personal consequences demonstrates her strong leadership qualities. She does not wait for permission to act—she takes initiative, showing her courage and strategic thinking by warning her comrades of the enemy's attack on the Emperor's castle.



Figure 2.19 Mulan having a word with the commander

Furthermore, the commander acknowledged Mulan's bravery and loyalty by saying, "Your loyalty and bravery are without question. You will lead us as we ride to the Imperial City. Ready the horses." Solidifies her role as a leader and how the commander acknowledges her as an equal. Although she was seen as a "traitor" for hiding her true identity, her actions prove that true honor comes from one's actions. Such as Mulan's determination and her leadership nature to defeat the huns. By entrusting her with the mission to lead the warriors to the Imperial City, the commander recognizes her capability and treats her as an equal. Reinforcing the idea that leadership is defined by strength and intelligence rather than gender.

According to the BSRI theory, this trait is typically associated with men who are willing to take risks. However, in this case, Mulan was seen risking her life on multiple occasions to save her fellow soldiers and her country.



Figure 2.20 Mulan triggering the avalanche

One of the most striking examples is the avalanche scene, where she risks her life to end the battle. As the enemy launches an attack, Mulan devises a bold strategy to redirect the enemy's forces, triggering an avalanche that buries the opposing troops. Instead of retreating to safety, she charges into the avalanche, risking being swept away to rescue her fellow soldiers. This shows her selflessness and quick thinking regardless of her gender.

Mulan's return to warn her comrades despite the risk that she will face execution demonstrates her commitment to keep them safe while being selfless with her own life.



Figure 2.21 Mulan pleads the commander to listen to her

MULAN: Kill me if you must. But first, listen.

01:17:21 - 01:17:24

Mulan's defiance plea with the commander, "Kill me if you must. But first, listen," goes beyond a simple act of being brave; it reveals a sense of duty despite her fear. Even when she stands in front of the commander who can execute her at any moment, her priority remains the same, which is the safety of her country. This reflects her willingness to take on such extreme risk, which challenges the traditional idea that only men can have such courage and bravery. Mulan's action demonstrates that bravery and a deep sense of responsibility are not limited by gender but can be found in anyone.

Other masculine traits that Mulan embraces are assertiveness and having a strong personality. Her assertiveness is evident in the way she directly challenges Bori Khan,



Figure 2.22 Mulan fighting Bori Khan in the Emperor's place

Throughout the fight, Mulan demonstrates dominance, utilizing her agility and intelligence to outsmart Bori Khan, rather than relying solely on brute strength. This shows that assertiveness is not just about physical power, but also confidence and decisiveness. By taking initiative in facing her enemy head-on, Mulan indicates that she is in control of the situation; she has the upper hand in the battle and is confident that she can defeat him. Mulan defies traditional gender expectations, proving that strength and assertiveness are not exclusive to men. The emperor's words further support Mulan's assertiveness: "Rise up. You are a mighty warrior. Rise up like a phoenix. Fight for the kingdom and its people." This shows how she has earned the respect of the most powerful figure in the kingdom despite her gender. She did not wait for approval or acceptance but took control of her destiny, stood her ground, and fought for what she believed in.

Mulan also has a strong personality. In the training grounds, none of her comrades succeed in reaching the top while carrying two buckets full of water, but she manages to do it.



Figure 2.23 Mulan demonstrating her strong personality

This scene not only highlights the physical challenges of the task but also the mental challenges. Mulan's success is not merely about physical endurance but also her strong personality. In the BSRI theory, this trait that Mulan exhibits is typically associated with men, and most women are perceived as weaker and less capable than men. Mulan proves that she possesses an equal amount of strength to a male. Unlike other recruits who boast about their strength, she does not rely on forceful strength. Instead, Mulan is patient, focused, and determined, proving that true strength is not about dominance but perseverance. This demonstrates that she has a strong personality and possesses the capability of a warrior.

From the explanation above, it is clear that Mulan demonstrates her agency powerfully. She finally liberates herself and takes control of her life by running away from home and embracing her *Chi*. This shows the first choice that she had made in her life, which aligns well with Giddens' concept of agency. When she ran away from home and masquerade herself as a man, she did not fully embrace her *Chi*. As her journey went on, she got used to practicing and using her *Chi* from the commander's encouragement. Her journey took a turning point when she revealed her true identity as a woman, and that is where she fully embraces her *Chi*. Mulan faced some tempting benefits when she encounters the witch, but Mulan refuses the offer and makes a powerful choice by standing on her ground, and that is to protect the emperor and the city. Not only that, Mulan also embraces her feminine and masculine sides, proving that strength is not always about physical power; it can also come from within. Which aligns with the BSRI theory. Mulan embraces her feminine traits unconsciously; a lot of people might think that she does not have this side, but if we look a little deeper, she actually has them. Such as her deep love for her family, especially her sister