Gender and Subjective Agency: Transformations of Mulan in Chinese, Sinophone and Transnational Contexts

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of the research is to investigate gender representations of the cross-dressing heroine in the Mulan retellings, produced in China and Sinophone regions, namely Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan, and in non-Sinophone regions, including the United States, Japan, France and Belgium. The thesis examines the Mulan texts, dating from the 10th century to the year 2009, in a variety of genres: poetry, novel, opera, spoken drama, film, picture book, comics, animation and television serials for both adult and child readers. The study situates the Mulan texts historically and contextually, and explores the transformation of gender images of Mulan in relation to Confucian values, modernity, diaspora, cultural consumption, and more importantly, to female subjective agency. Drawing upon Judith Butler's gender performance theory, this study also aims to investigate the extent to which the heroine is enabled to obtain agency through the instability of gender identities and whether the heroine can escape the Confucian metanarrative of the Mulan story particularly in the modern texts and transnational texts. (Un)surprisingly, the emancipation of the heroine is not in conformity with the feminist movements in modern time; there can be a significant backlash in the gender image of Mulan in some modern texts. Also, most of the transnational texts, though possibly influenced by a western feminist point of view, often adopt an Orientalist view of China and Chineseness, thereby constructing a seemingly subversive but in practice a traditional heroine. However, the most feminist retellings in comparison come from three picture books for young readers. The three feminist texts, one from Asian America, one from Taiwan, the other from China, suggest that the emancipation of the cross-dressing heroine in a patriarchal narrative is possible.

STATEMENT OF AUTHROSHIP

I hereby state that the following thesis is entirely my own original work and has not been submitted for any other degree to any other University or educational institution. All sources of information used in this thesis have been indicated and due acknowledgement has been given to the work of others.

Yu-Chi Liu
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Introduction

After Disney launched its animated film adaptation onto the global market in 1998, Mulan became the most well-known Chinese woman in the world, whose story has not only been continuously retold "as the tool for the grand scheme of national salvation" (Lan, 231) for Chinese people around the world but also aroused the interest of western people to unveil mysterious China and its culture through retelling her story. Moreover, the latest Mulan film, employing the story of the cross-dressing heroine, broadcasts the idea of anti-war in order to mediate a more humane and peace-loving image of China to global audiences. No other Chinese literary figure can compete with Mulan in the number of historical representations in the past and continuing into the present age.

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of research concerned with Mulan. A lot of early research in China and Taiwan was concerned with the authenticity of the heroine and her story; however, there has been a clear shift in attention from a focus on the original story to an emphasis on other Mulan retellings, particularly Maxine Hong Kingston's woman warrior and the Disney animation. Both before and after I started writing up the results of my research, some articles and books regarding *The Ballad of Mulan* and the Mulan retellings were published. It is informative and helpful to read the analyses of these scholars as they approach the Mulan story/retelling from various viewpoints and therefore provide diverse results and interpretations. Sheng-Mei Ma (2000), focusing on Kingston's and Disney's retellings, interrogates the inextricability of Orientalism and Asian American cultures. Eric K. W. Yu (2001), in a study encompassing quite a few Mulan retellings, examines the story from a narratologist's point of view. Feng Lan's analysis (2003) adopts a historicist approach, whereas Lan Dong's research (2006) emphasizes more the Mulan texts produced for child readers.[1] In comparison with these insightful analyses, my research covers a variety of genres and examines the Mulan texts produced in several languages and countries for both adult and child readers over the last 1000 years.

Although many articles have been published, few deal with the story from the perspective of gender representation and if they do so, they confine their analyses either to one particular Mulan story or to a single literary genre. Eric K. W. Yu has suggested that the Mulan story implicitly denotes a possibility of overturning proprieties in traditional

[1] Lan Dong's has recently published a book about Mulan. My thesis was at the stage of final preparation when her book appeared and I was unable to consult it. Dong, Lan. *Mulan's Legend and Legacy in China and the United States*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2011.

society (2001: 41), but Gillian Youngs (1999), among many others, argued that gender-swapping is a problematic basis for representations of female emancipation. How is this possibility of transformation brought out in Mulan retellings, which, through an emancipated and agentic heroine, must not only interrogate normative gender categories but further challenge Confucian tradition embedded in the story?

Thus, my research attempts to explore the possibility of a feminist retelling of the Confucian Mulan story through examining a large quantity of the Mulan retellings in various genres for both adult and child readers. A feminist version of the Mulan story is a retelling in which the heroine manifests subjective agency and resistance against ideological pressure from patriarchy and finally escapes the Confucian metanarrative of the Mulan story. According to John Stephens, subjectivity "represents an individual's sense of always becoming a subject – in the sense of being subject to some measure of external constraint – and as an agent – that is, being capable of conscious and deliberate thought and action" (245); hence, subjective agency indicates a subjectivity which is particularly characterized by access to agency. In many Mulan retellings, the heroine is portrayed as able to perform both traditional femininity and genuine masculinity, which demonstrates the possibility of gender fluidity and also significantly challenges the conception that gender is innate. A cross-dressing heroine with gender fluidity possesses a certain level of subjective agency; however, a feminist Mulan heroine does not need to sacrifice femininity or perform authentic masculinity while cross-dressing. She does not need to perform the two polarized gender behaviours; instead, she performs an alternative femininity, which is beyond social expectations but attributes her with a high level of liberty and agency. Judith Butler's performativity is a theory of resistance, which I find very applicable to analysis of gender performances in representations of Mulan and for evaluating the extent to which Mulan has been attributed with subjective agency.

Also, through comparing the Mulan retellings produced at different cultural moments across a long historical period, the dominant ideologies regarding gender issues in history will be exposed. In their book *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature*, John Stephens and Robyn McCallum explore the processes of retelling across a variety of stories told for young readers and find "the crux of the difference" between two narratives of a story "is that any particular retelling may purport to transmit elements of a culture's formative traditions and even its sustaining beliefs and assumptions, but what it always discloses is some aspect of the attitudes and ideologies pertaining at the cultural moment in which that retelling is produced" (ix). That

is to say, when comparing a retelling to its pre-text or another retelling, not only the different ideologies and attitudes in relation to the cultures in which the two narratives are told can be manifested, but also the shared ideologies and assumptions, usually implicit and invisible, can be revealed. Thus, through comparing different retellings of the Mulan story produced at various historical periods, the dominant ideologies that construct/limit gender performances will therefore be disclosed and we will also be provided with an opportunity to look at the historical development of feminist thinking.

In view of the preceding research purpose, the main questions addressed in my study include (a) how Mulan's gender performances are represented in each retelling, (b) how the diasporic texts mediate between Chinese tradition and diasporic cultures, (c) how the western retellings represent images of China, and (d) how the interaction of different narrative forms construct gender image of Mulan in the multi-modal system form of retellings. The study may lead to a better understanding of gender performances and transformations of Mulan inside and outside China over one thousand years, and the result may pose a challenge to the assumption that gender-swapping is problematic for representing female emancipation.

As an ideology critique, my thesis as a whole is intertexual and transnational, encompassing Mulan retellings from different world regions, such as China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, France, Belgium, Australia and America; it covers multiple genres, drawing Mulan texts from Chinese ballad, opera, novels for both adult and young adult readers, picture books and comics for children, films and television serials. A total of 48 Mulan texts are included in my thesis. Due to the popularity of the Mulan retellings, it is impossible to gather and include every retelling here. For this reason, I include the texts which to some extent manifest different gender performances ranging from traditional, ambiguous (gender fluidity), to feminist.

My thesis is divided into six chapters according to genres. Introduction briefly points out the research direction of the whole thesis. Chapter One provides an introduction to Butler's performativity theory and examines six Mulan texts produced in feudal China before 1900 when Confucian teaching was widely practiced and moral virtues were highly praised in Chinese society. Chapter Two investigates 18 texts retold in opera, novel and movie narratives after 1900 and collected from China and Sinophone regions (I have taken the term "Sinophone" from Shu-Mei Shih's *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific*). As gender performances of the heroine are strongly related to the historical backgrounds in which the retellings are produced, and Hong Kong, Taiwan, and

China have had different historical experiences, particularly after 1949, the term "Sinophone" can solve the problem I encounter when analyzing the retellings. According to Shih, the Sinophone is "a network of places of cultural production outside China and on the margins of China and Chineseness, where a historical process of heterogenizing and localizing of continental Chinese culture has been taking place for several countries" (4); moreover, "it frustrates easy suturing . . . while foregrounding the value of difficulty, difference, and heterogeneity (5). Due to the various historical experiences, the image of Mulan has become heterogeneous and multiple-faceted after 1900.

Chapter Three embarks on the image representations of China and Mulan in two diasporic retellings and three international retellings; it explores the potential of the diasporic Mulan text to provide an alternative Chinese femininity and further modify Confucian tradition in the story; it also seeks to investigate how imaginary Orientalist conception shapes the image of China and limits the possibility of Mulan from becoming an emancipated heroine. Chapter Four deals with ten Mulan texts produced in verbal and visual forms, such as comics and picture books, for child readers; it explores how the interaction of verbal and visual narratives constructs the Mulan image and examines whether the texts produced mainly for children can provide different gender models which promise gender equality. Chapter Five includes Disney's *Mulan* and five other animated adaptations; it first examines the familial relationship of Mulan with other Disney princesses and then seeks to expose Orientalist viewpoints operating in Disney's *Mulan* and *Mulan II*, which explicitly suggest that American culture is superior to Chinese culture; it then focuses on the Mulan animated cartoons produced by several small entertainment companies to determine whether they can provide different images of China and the Chinese heroine from those of Disney's adaptations.

Chapter Six deals with retellings in two television serials and the latest movie version; as a conclusion of the research project, these three texts interestingly represent three different types of femininity: traditional femininity, modern femininity, and suppressed femininity, and they also construct the tone of the story in significantly different ways: traditional, humorous, and sad. The differences of the three texts reflect the tendency that the production and marketing of the Mulan story has entered a global era, a time in which heterogeneity is encouraged and welcomed. Conclusion concludes the whole study by proposing three different types of the Mulan heroine — traditional, ambiguous (gender fluidity), and feminist — in which subjective agency ranges from low to high.

Finally, the English translations of the Chinese names of the authors from Chinese and

Sinophone regions appear with surname following by first name.[2] The names of people from the Diaspora appear according to anglicized order with first name coming before the last name; or in some cases the way in which the name is presented reproduces how it appears on the cover of the retellings. Moreover, the Chinese texts which appear in some chapters are all written in traditional Chinese characters for the sake of convenience, and also because the process of simplifying Chinese characters in China was implemented gradually, so that some simplified Chinese characters which appeared in Mulan texts in the 1950s no longer exist.

[2] Because the Romanization practices of Chinese characters are not the same in China and Taiwan, the English translations of the Chinese names will be determined by the origins of the authors. Besides, there is a hyphen between the two characters in a given name in the practice in Taiwan, but there is not in China.

Chapter One

Gender and Morality: Confucian Mulan

Introduction

When retelling a traditional story like the Mulan legend for modern readers, story tellers could be met with a great challenge to reconcile the conflicts between the conservative moral assumptions embedded in the pre-text and the modern gender concepts drawn from modern societies. Like many retellings of traditional stories, the Mulan retellings perform important cultural functions—transmitting cultural heritage, maintaining social conformity, and providing patterns of behaviour. Reconstructing a gender image of Mulan preferable to modern viewpoints to some extent means breaking its tie with traditional cultures. However, it is not an easy task to attribute the heroine with subjective agency in the retelling if one intends to maintain the ethical and social values inscribed in the pre-text. Also, as Stephens and McCallum suggest, "the processes of retelling are overwhelmingly subject to a limited number of conservative metanarratives—that is, the implicit and usually invisible ideologies, systems, and assumptions which operate globally in a society to order knowledge and experience" (3). The conservative metanarrative governing the Mulan pre-text and its retellings is Confucianism, which has been practiced for more than two thousand years in China. That is to say, Confucianism has dominated the processes of retelling and deeply penetrated the Mulan texts. Before exploring the possibilities in constructing an alternative gender image for the heroine, I will briefly review the history and doctrines of Confucianism in order to grasp how Confucian cultures shape the Mulan legend.

Before the twentieth century, China was a feudal monarchy, ruled by an Emperor. Due to its emphasis on morality and hierarchical relationships, Confucianism was chosen as a state orthodoxy to govern China during the reign of Emperor Wu (141-87 BC) in the Han Dynasty. Since then Confucianism has remained the mainstream of educational, political, ethical and philosophical systems throughout most of the history of the imperial dynasties in China. One of the most important Confucian doctrines is rites (li, 禮), the teaching of ritual/propriety; rites could "extend from ritual to propriety, from civil laws to codified customs, and from moral rules for behaviour to ethical senses for thinking, feeling and acting" (Yao, 192). Under the structure of rites, people are divided into different categories and hierarchical classes, and each person is assigned a particular position and patterns of

behaviour in family, community and society. One should behave according to li, namely, according to the position s/he is assigned and follow the "codes of behaviour" accordingly (Gier, 287). It is assumed "that if everybody acts in accordance with li, then the world would be peaceful and orderly, ruled without ruling, governed without governing, and ordered without ordering" (Yao, 192). An ideal Confucian society is a peaceful, orderly and harmonious society, which could be achieved if every member in society knows her/his own position and plays her/his assigned role properly.

Confucian thinking also emphasizes five human relationships (wu lun, 五倫), the foundation of relations in society: parent and child; emperor and subordinate; husband and wife; elder and younger siblings; friend and friend. In each relational group, everyone performs the role following ritual/propriety, which gives instructions on regulatory role practice and on the duty and responsibility obliged by each role. Ambrose King convincingly states that a Confucian society is a "relation-based society," in which "the emphasis is placed on the relation between particular individuals," and "each individual is expected to perform his particular role in the relational context" (63). The harmony of Confucian society thus considerably relies on the stability of relations between individuals. In order to assure each individual in society knows how to perform different roles in various relational contexts, practice of rites is necessary to be included as part of daily routine. Through the daily regulated practice and the repetition of acts and rituals, patterns of behaviour will gradually be internalized, and the behaviour of individuals will be based on ritual/propriety without discerning that the regulated behaviour is in reality constructed through Confucian teachings.

Mulan's joining the war on behalf of her elderly father, although it violates the stability of gender relation in her society, is a filial act performed according to Confucian teachings. The infringement of gender stability is, however, where the possibility of resistance and transformation for the heroine comes from, and where the heroine carries the potential to break through the story frame and to escape from the Confucian metanarrative. Mulan's triumph in crossing a gender boundary also echoes the fluid relation to gender identity that Judith Butler suggests: that is, "When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one" (1990, 1999: 10). In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler argues that

"the 'unity' of gender is the effect of a regulatory practice that seeks to render gender identity uniform through a compulsory heterosexuality" (1990, 1999: 42). Through the regulatory practice and the repetition of acts and gestures, patterns of heterosexual behaviour will little by little be internalized, and people will behave according to normative heterosexual regulation without questioning the arbitrary relation between sex and gender. The normative gender behaviour could lead to gender conformity and exclude other possible gender behaviours and hence will effectively produce the legitimacy of phallogocentrism and heterosexuality.

The Confucian society in which the Mulan story is produced is a gendered and heteronormative society. Several critics (Gier, 2001; Knapp, 2006) have pointed out that Confucian moral virtues are gendered and that the five human relationships in Confucianism are actually developed from male perspectives. Among the five human relationships, only the husband/wife relation makes reference to women. Mostly excluded from the five relational contexts, woman is assigned to play only one role—a wife—in Confucian society. In the husband/wife relationship, man is regulated to deal with the outside world, to protect his country and family whereas woman is regulated to stay home, to do household chores and to nurture the younger generation. As man is encouraged to pursue success and fame, woman is taught to be a dutiful wife and loving mother. With strict regulations, Confucian society is by all means phallogocentric and heteronormative. The relationship between man and woman is oppositional as well as hierarchical.

Being produced in a society in which a phallogocentric tradition has dominated its central values and assumptions, the story of Mulan seems to have little chance to escape the conservative gender construction of Confucian metanarrative. However, her infringement of gender stability does bring a possibility of resistance against phallogocentrism, and it also reveals that gender is constructed and performative. According to Butler, "performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration" (1990, 1999: xv) and "it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition" (1993: 12). Butler further claims, "The iterability of performativity is a theory of agency, one that cannot disavow power as the condition of its own possibility (xxiv). As Lois McNay explains, "Repetition denotes both a process of profound corporeal inscription and also a

fundamental instability at the heart of dominant gender norms" (33). That is to say, the performativity of gender could bring possibilities of subversion and resistance against the hegemonic structure, phallogocentrism in particular. To quote McNay's explication of Butler's performative agency again,

> Agency is a sedimented effect of reiterative or ritualized practices; the repeated inscription of the symbolic norms of heterosexuality upon the body and the living through of those norms permits the emergence of a stable bodily ego (1993a: 14). The performative construction of gender identity causes agency in that the identificatory processes, through which norms are materialized, permits the stabilization of a subject who is capable of resisting those norms. (34-35)

Mulan's gender construction is performative even though her story is produced in a tightly phallogocentric Confucian society. Thus, in terms of Butler's theory, the performativity of gender construction can generate agency, with which Mulan can perform gender against social norms and further have a chance to elude Confucian metanarrative.

But is it possible to retell the existing metanarrative against male supremacy and domination when the gender construction of the heroine is strongly connected with the moral assumptions in the story? In this chapter, I will look at six Mulan stories (Appendix 1), including two poems, one opera and three novelistic retellings, all written before 1900, namely, when China was an imperial state and Confucian thinking was widely practiced in Chinese society. I will explore how different genres represent the heroine, how femininity and masculinity of the heroine are constructed in each story, and how Mulan comes to become the moral icon for Chinese people. Although it is very unlikely to find a feminist retelling of the Mulan story in this period, the representations of the heroine in these stories do reflect a slight shift in social values in Chinese society. In order to discern the differences, I will begin with the earliest written record of the heroine's story, *The Ballad of Mulan*.

***The Ballad of Mulan*: Filial Piety**

The most common view of Mulan's cross-dressing story is that the earliest written record is found in *The Ballad of Mulan*, written by an anonymous author and collected in *Yuefu Shiji*, a compendium of ballads and folk songs edited by a Song Dynasty (AD 960-1279) scholar,

Guo Maoqian.[3] But as with many other oldest legends in the world, numerous questions surrounding her story still remain unsolved. Opinion is divided on whether she existed or not; there are also divergent accounts of her surname, her place of origin, and the era she lived in. In addition to these disagreements, scholars even lack any consensus regarding the time *The Ballad of Mulan* was composed and the enemy Mulan was fighting against. There are about a hundred research articles on Mulan,[4] and scholars nowadays are still carrying on textual research in order to figure out which era Mulan lived in and when the ballad was written down. These questions probably will always remain unsolved; no ultimate agreement seems likely to be achieved in the recent future. Questions in regard to authenticity will not be explored here; instead, I will mainly focus on gender representation of the heroine in the stories.

Before I embark on the analysis, it is necessary to look at *The Ballad of Mulan*, as it is generally accepted as the first version of the story, and hence it could be regarded as the pre-text of all the Mulan retellings. Here is the English translation version quoted from Jeff Kurtti's *The Art of Mulan*.

Click click, and click click click,
By the doorway Mulan weaves.
When all at once the shuttles cease,
A sigh is heard with solemn grief.
"O my daughter who is on your mind?
O my daughter who is in your heart?"
"I have no one on my mind,
I have no one in my heart.
But last night I read the battle roll,
A roll consisting of twelve scrolls.
The Khan is drafting an army of awe,
My father's name on each beadroll.
Alas Father has no grown son,

[3] There are different voices in the earliest written record of the Mulan story. While most people believe it is first found in *Yuefu Shiji*, some claim the earliest version appears in *Gujin Yulu*, edited by a scholar in Southern-Chen Dynasty (AD 557-589) and some allege that it first appears in He Chengtien's (AD 370-447) book, *Xing Yuan*. See Canzhang Huang, and Shaoyi Li, *Study on Hua Mulan* [花木蘭考] (Beijing: China Broadcast Television Chubanshe, 1992). The English title of the book is my translation.

[4] Jia-Ji Lai, "Commentary on *The Ballad of Mulan*" [木蘭詩箋證] *Foguang Journal* 2 (1999): 151-241. The English title of the article is my translation.

Alas Mulan has no elder brother.
But I will buy a saddle and a horse,
And join the army in place of Father."

In the East Market she buys a steed,
From the West Market she buys a saddle.
In the North Market she buys a long whip,
From the South Market she buys a bridle.
At dawn she bids her family farewell,
At dusk she camps by the Yellow River.
She no longer hears her parents calling,
Upon her pillow the waters whisper.
At dawn she departs the Yellow River,
At dusk she arrives at Black Mountain.
She no longer hears her parents calling,
But Tartar horses wailing from Yen Mountain.

She gallops ten thousand miles,
For the war she has to honor.
She crosses lofty hills,
Like an eagle soaring over.
From northern gusts, through biting chills,
Echoes the watchman's clapper.
With wintry glow, of icy hue,
Light glimmers on her armour.
Generals die in a hundred battles,
Our Warrior's back, how ten years fly.

Upon her return she is summoned to see the Emperor.
In the Hall of Light, she receives the highest honor.
She is awarded a promotion to top rank.
The Emperor bestows hundreds of thousands in prizes.
The Khan asks her what she desires.
"Mulan has no use for a Minister's post,

Mulan has no other extravagant want.
I wish to borrow a swift-footed mount,
To take me back to my home."

When Father and Mother hear she's coming,
They watch by the gate, bracing each other.
When Elder Sister hears she's coming,
She runs to her room, and dabs on rouge powder.
When Little Brother hears she's coming,
He whets his knife, flashing like a light,
And prepares pig and sheep for dinner.
"O let me push open the door to East Chamber,
O let me sit on my bed in West Recess.
So swiftly comes off the warrior's vesture,
And silently I put on my old-time dress.
Beside the window, I dress up my hair,
In front of a mirror, I rouge my face.
And when I walk out to meet my compeers,
They are perplexed and amazed."
"For twelve years, we fought as comrades-in-arms,
The Mulan we knew was not a lady of charm!"

They say to choose a hare, you pick them up by the ear,
There are telling signs to compare:
In air the male will kick and strike,
While females stare with bleary eyes.
But if both are set to the ground,
And left to bounce in a flee,
Who will be so wise as to observe,
That the hare is a he or she? (12-13)

As there are divergent opinions on the authenticity and the origin of the story, so are there diverse interpretations and implications of the ballad. Critics from Sinophone regions generally perceive the Mulan story as an exemplum of moral behaviour, but there are

different opinions about the most obvious and important moral demonstrated in the ballad. Scholars from Hong Kong and Taiwan tend to consistently interpret the ballad as a filial story, praising the morality of filial piety performed by the heroine, whereas scholars from China seemingly have various interpretations. Generally, most of the scholars in China agree that the ballad is about patriotism, focusing on the patriotic spirit performed by ordinary people, someone like Mulan. According to Lee Shusheng, the Chinese language and literature textbook for high school students in China clearly states that *The Ballad of Mulan* represents the optimistic, brave and patriotic spirit of working people, and their longing for a peaceful laboring life (98). People can certainly have different interpretations of the same literary work, and the different interpretations not only show the various perspectives from where the critics look at the work but to some extent render the implicit attitudes and ideologies of critics explicit. It is interesting to examine these invisible ideologies; however, the purpose of my thesis is not to explore the various ideologies critics have, but to investigate how the heroine performs gender and morality under the implicit Confucian ideologies.

In the Mulan story, her joining of the army on behalf of her father is a compelled decision. She has to sacrifice femininity in order to perform filial piety. After closely reading anecdotes of filial daughters from the early medieval period in China, Knapp concludes that women generally perform the same filial acts as men, but "women had to go to greater extremes to express their filial devotion" (2006: 164). In *the Ballad of Mulan*, the heroine's aging father is recruited by the imperial army; he can easily lose his life in the battlefield if he accedes to the recruitment. Mulan has no elder brother and her younger brother is too young to join the war. The masculine figure, who is supposed to undertake the responsibility for protecting the family and the state, is either too old or too young in her family. Among the three levels of filial piety described by the ancient Chinese philosopher Zengzi, one should "serve one's parents with reverence and ensure that they had a decent life" at the lowest level (Yao, 203). If Mulan wants to ensure that her father has a decent life, she has no choice but to disguise herself as a male soldier. She has to endanger her life for her father because, as Knapp finds, "filial piety was perceived as a male virtue that females performed in the absence of male relatives. In short, filial females were surrogate sons" (164-5). Thus the cross-dressing Mulan performs filial piety in the absence of her non-existent elder brother; she has to sacrifice her femininity—that is, go to greater extremes—in order to perform the *male* version of filial piety. Under the Confucian

metanarrative of the Mulan story, the heroine is trapped in a dilemma between keeping her femininity and performing filial acts. Paradoxically, she has to violate gender norms regulated by Confucian doctrine in order to perform filial piety based on Confucian teaching. However, the ballad does not provide a clear description about how she performs gender during her cross-dressing period in the army; instead, it gives a more detailed elaboration of her performance of femininity.

To begin with, when the ballad begins Mulan is depicted weaving ceaselessly on a loom near the doorway. The loom is a private space, where women perform female work and construct female identity. The clicking sound of the weaving machine denotes that Mulan is performing a daily routine, weaving. Through the repetitive work of weaving, Mulan reiterates a female gender act and is identified as a woman. As the ballad goes on, Mulan suddenly ceases weaving and sighs with solemn grief. Her parent asks her *who* makes her worried and assumes that Mulan must be troubled by someone, quite possibly a lover. Several scholars (Lee Chun-sheng, 1965; Li Shaoyi, 1992) have noted that the questions posed by Mulan's parent are an imitation version of *The Song of Breaking Willow Branch* from Northern Dynasty (AD 385-581): "O my daughter who is on your mind? O my daughter who is in your heart? Mother has agreed to marry me off; no good news has been heard so far this year."[5] By imitating the questions relating to marriage, the ballad implicitly denotes that a young woman like Mulan, when worried, must be worried about marriage because marriage is the only thing a young woman is supposed to be concerned about. The questions, to some extent signifying Confucian regulation of female performance, also help construct Mulan's femininity. Furthermore, Mulan's performance of femininity is once again emphasized near the end of the ballad. After returning home from the war, she cannot wait to take off her armour, symbol of masculinity, and resume her female clothes, symbol of femininity. She immediately dresses up her hair and rouges her face in front of a mirror—a female gender act. She is reiterating the feminine behaviour and practicing the female role as she did 12 years ago.

In contrast to the reinforcement of the heroine's femininity, Mulan's masculine performance is not clear and can only be imagined in the ballad. As a cross-dressing soldier, Mulan is supposed to hide femininity and reiterate masculine conduct on the frontier. However, it is unclear how she performs masculinity. Because the highest rank is bestowed

[5] The original Chinese text is as follows: 問女何所思，問女何所憶。阿婆許嫁女，今年無消息。It is quoted from *The Song of Breaking Willow Branch* [折楊柳枝歌]. The English translation is mine. Hereafter, if the English translation is mine, it will not be notified; otherwise, the translation source will be informed.

upon Mulan by the emperor after the war, it is imaginable that she must have performed with great courage and skillful martial arts, attributes linked with masculinity, during her army career. Some critics (Li Zhonghe, 2002; Liu Zhengjun, 2004) have noticed that ther ten-year military life is described in a sketchy way and the rather short domestic life is, on the contrary, depicted in a detailed way. As domestic life is associated with femininity, which has been highlighted in the ballad, military life and masculinity has been rendered relatively unimportant. The ballad is neither heroic nor desolate as a war ballad is supposed to be; it is full of, as Liu Zhengjun observes, "femininity and womanliness" [Zhifenqi, 脂粉氣] (109). The femininity of *The Ballad of Mulan* can on the one hand foreground its difference from the masculine war epic, and on the other hand provide the cross-dressing heroine with a possibility to develop subjective agency, which will enable her to perform gender against social norms and in the end escape the Confucian metanarrative of the story.

However, *The Ballad of Mulan* does not give full play to the possibility. Although Mulan's success in crossing the gender boundary does suggest that gender is constructed, the representation of gender is grounded on Confucian regulations. The possibility of the heroine's transformation is ambiguous, as is the hare scene in the end of the ballad. By setting two hares with different sexes together and concluding that no one can tell their sexes, the ballad not only denotes the equality between woman and man, but also implies the coming of marriage, namely, the female subordination to Confucian regulations. As the ending hints, an alternative gender image of the heroine is only suggested in the ballad.

***The Song of Mulan*: Loyalty**

The second poem about Mulan is called *The Song of Mulan*, written by Wei Yuanfu, a high-ranking governor in the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907). Both *The Ballad of Mulan* and *The Song of Mulan* are collected in *Yuefu Shiji* by Guo Maoqian, and are together designated *The Two Poems of Mulan*. The second poem is much shorter than the original ballad. Following the basic storyline of the pre-text, Wei makes several modifications in his retold version in order to highlight the heroine's performance of masculinity and the moral virtues she achieves at the end of the story.

Firstly, while the ballad begins with Mulan's reiteration of woman's daily routine, weaving, Wei's version starts with the worries and the deep sigh of the heroine. Omitting the repetitive performance of femininity, *The Song of Mulan* goes directly to details that explain Mulan's anxiety. By doing so, the heroine's filial love towards her father will be

emphasized at the expense of gender performance, and thereby the gender construction of the heroine will be rendered relatively insignificant. Secondly, there is no description of how Mulan cross-dresses from a young girl to a male soldier in the ballad whereas the process of Mulan's abandonment of femininity has been given more detail in Wei's poem—she takes off her silk clothes, washes off her makeup, and rides off heroically towards the battlefield. Furthermore, the thorough description of Mulan's resumption of female role after returning home has been omitted in Wei's poem. Unlike the original ballad, in which femininity has been the focal point, *The Song of Mulan* places more emphasis on the heroine's performance of masculinity rather than on her performance of femininity. The de-emphasis of the heroine's femininity performance will make the poem more like a masculine war epic and further imply that masculinity is essential in a war story like Mulan's story, which therefore suggests there is no room for the cross-dressing heroine to perform gender against social norms. Moreover, as Feng Lan aptly observes, the hares scene at the end of the story has been replaced by the praise for the moral virtues the heroine has achieved in her journey (234). That is to say, through laying emphasis on the heroine's moral virtues and masculinity performance and downplaying her performance of femininity, *The Song of Mulan* not only reinforces traditional gender roles but also diminishes the possibility of gender equality and the heroine's potential for resisting gender norms in the original ballad.

Some scholars (Chen Youbin, 2000; Lan, 2003) have pointed out that the overemphasis on filial piety and loyalty has turned the poem to the service of circulating Confucian ideas. Written by an imperial governor in the middle Tang Dynasty, a time when Confucianism receives highly political and educational status and is fully practiced in China, *The Song of Mulan* does not cache its dominant ideology pertaining the time when the poem is produced. As a governor, who is regulated to perform loyalty to his emperor, Wei openly praises Mulan as the model of subordination to the monarch and concludes clearly in his poem that the example of Mulan's filial devotion and loyalty will enable her to be remembered even thousands of years later. However, the theme of filial piety is clear in the ballad, but the implicit theme of loyalty is actually made explicit and reinforced in the second poem. In the Confucian five human relations, loyalty can be regarded as the social version of filial piety, which can easily be appropriated and interpreted as loyalty. As King argues, the emperor-subordinate relationship can actually be interpreted as different version of father-son relationship.

> Among the five cardinal relations, three belong to the kinship realm. The remaining two, though not family relationships, are conceived of in terms of the family. The relationship between the ruler and the ruled is conceived of in terms of father (*chiln-fu*) and son (*tzu-min*), and the relationship between friend and friend is stated in terms of elder brother (*wu-husiung*) and younger brother (*wu-ti*). True enough, the true cardinal kinship relations are only the major family relationships (58).

Hence, a subordinate's loyalty towards his emperor is the equivalent of a son's filial piety towards his father. Furthermore, returning home with great achievement, Mulan not merely brings honor to her family, but also performs the highest level of filial piety according to Zengzi's definition—"one would honor and glorify one's parents by one's achievement in moral cultivation and by one's service to the people and the state" (Yao, 203). It is not difficult to shift the focus on filial piety to loyalty in a narrative like the Mulan story, and it is also imaginable that the importance of loyalty will usurp the position of filial loyalty in some Mulan retellings.

***Maid Mulan Joins the Army in Her Father's Stead* : Chastity**

The first opera version of the Mulan story, *Maid Mulan Joins the Army in Her Father's Stead* (雌木蘭替父從軍), is written by a Ming playwright, Xu Wei, in AD 1556. During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) Neo-Confucianism becomes the state orthodoxy and opera continues to be one of the most popular literary genres after the golden age in opera history in Yuan Dynasty (AD 1271-1368). As critics put it, opera in China is not for providing entertainment to the public, but rather a way for the ruling class to pass down teachings to the uneducated citizens. Xu Wei's opera version, a genre which required more detail than poetry, certainly carries moral values to be broadcast to the audience. In his retelling, he makes several noticeable alterations. Many critics have noticed that Xu Wei's opera is the first Mulan retelling which gives the heroine the surname "Hua," and the heroine hereafter is known as "Hua Mulan." It also provides more information about the heroine's family and the historical background of her story. In his version, the epoch Mulan lives in is North Wei Dynasty; she has studied both classical learning and martial arts since she was a child, and the enemy she is fighting against changes from foreign intruders to bandits within the state. The most striking alteration in Xu Wei's version is that Mulan is married right after

she returns home, actually the same day she returns home.

Xu Wei is a very controversial scholar in Chinese literature history. Because his literary works have a strong connection with his life, it might be helpful to briefly look at his life before proceeding with discussion of the work. Although he was one of the most distinguished scholars in the Ming Dynasty, Xu Wei never passed the civil service examination—the pathway to officialdom in imperial China. He was invited to be a secretary by the governor-general of Zhejiang province, Hu Zongxian, at the age of 37. Hu thought highly of him and at once assigned him to join the military campaign against enemies coming from the southeastern coast of China. Xu Wei's ingenious war plans resulted in victory for the army and also involved him in extraordinary exploits. However, luck started going against him after Hu died. Due to his unconventional and unrestrained behaviour, he offended many people and hence lost the chance of fulfilling his goals in officialdom. After continuous failures to enter officialdom and achieve his ambitions, he became depressed and this gradually led him to a disastrous life. He abandoned himself to alcohol and frequented brothels, and soon suffered from emotional breakdown. The most tragic incident in his life probably is that he killed his third wife because he suspected she has been unfaithful to him. The murderous act cost him seven years in prison. After returning home, he continuously suffered from mental disorder. He once pierced his left ear with a long bamboo-made nail and took it out from his right ear; he even hammered his testes until they were crushed. He suffered an impoverished and miserable old age and died at the age of 73 (Huang year; Hsiung, 1998).

Many critics have argued that Xu 's unconventional and subversive spirit is reflected in his literary works. *Maid Mulan Joins the Army in Her Father's Stead* together with another three plays are collected in Xu's most famous literary work *Sisheng Yuan* (Four wails of a gibbon; 四聲猿); the title indicates the author's "grief," his "personal outcries" (Hsiung, 82) and his disappointment at the then current situation. Besides the Mulan story, *Female First-place Scholar Declines a She-phoenix and Gets a He-phoenix* (女狀元辭凰得鳳) is a cross-dressing story about a heroine named Chuntao, who attends the civil service examination in the identity of man, wins the first-place of official scholar, and outperforms all of her male colleagues in officialdom. Chuntao's female identity is revealed when the prime minister asks her to be his son-in-law. Instead of being his son-in-law, she becomes the prime minister's daughter-in-law at the end of the story. Mulan and Chuntao both manifest unconventional female spirit and capabilities in the male realm, which perhaps

can be regarded as the reflection of Xu's protest at the rigid hierarchism of Confucianism and his assertion of women's ability. However, there are different judgments as to whether Xu really gives praise to women's ability.

In his book *History of the Development of Chinese Literature* (中國文學發展史), Liu Dajie comments that the two plays not only respect woman's rights but also praises their wisdom and capability. Lan Feng also remarks that Xu's *Mulan* "goes further than the original Mulan poem" as it "openly celebrates the strength and wisdom of women" (234). With Xu's modifications, Mulan performs extraordinary femininity from the outset, which seems to promise the heroine with autonomous agency, and with which she can freely perform different modes of gender behaviour and thus escape the Confucian metanarrative of the Mulan story. In the opera, Mulan's unconventional feminine spirit is first shown when she makes up her mind to take her father's place on the battlefield. She utters, "To erect the earth and support the heaven, why is a 'macho guy' [男兒漢] needed!"[6] As a female, her ambition is astonishing and unprecedented. Moreover, she even claims that the achievement in the war, traditionally regarded as a great accomplishment for male, can be gained without much effort. Upon the completion of her journey, Mulan recalls her achievement in the war and declares "I killed bandits and captured their leader, being a woman who masquerades as a man. I get credit without much effort." The bold spirit of Mulan is by no means traditionally feminine, nor it can be deemed simply masculine.

Before joining the war, Xu's Mulan demonstrates instability and fluidity of gender identity. Her masculine attributes are also manifested right after she changes her clothes. After putting on military armour, she practices various sorts of weapons and demonstrates exceptional skill in martial arts. She claims that her hands, which are accustomed to the weaving shuttle, feel no ache when she lifts up the sword. She asserts that "[i]n the deep mountains I can capture alive a monkey; [w]ith one shake of reins I can trample flat the fox fortress." As Hsiung puts it, "Mulan's vigorous spirit and bold anticipation of her future glory demonstrate an active masculine energy" (76). Indeed, before heading for the battlefield, Mulan performs active masculinity and her performance of femininity, or of traditional femininity, has been rendered less significant. However, Xu's retelling does not elaborate on the heroine's gender fluidity; instead, it asserts masculinity is the crucial and

[6] The English translations of *Maid Mulan Joins the Army in Her Father's Stead*, together with the titles of Xu Wei's opera, are all quoted from Hsiung's article. See Hsiung, Ann-Marie. "A Feminist Re-Vision of Xu Wei's *Ci Mulan* and *Nü zhuangyuan*." *China in a Polycentric World: Essays in Chinese Comparative Literature*. Ed. Yinjin Zhang. Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 1998. 73-89.

exclusive gender behaviour one is allowed to perform on the battlefield.

After Mulan arrives at the battlefield, particularly when she sees the weak and undignified soldiers in the army, the idea of achieving fame as a goal appears in her mind. She encourages herself to work hard in youth in order to step up to Lingyange, a pavilion where the emperor Tai-zong of the Tang Dynasty treats his 24 most outstanding officials. According to Huang Lizhen, Lingyange is the usual metaphor for making great contributions and accomplishing great tasks for the state (14). Mulan actually identifies herself as a man here as it is impossible for women to become governors at the time she is born. Her female identity has totally been put aside. In Xu's retelling, Mulan performs great masculinity at the expense of femininity during her army life. The potential of constructing a heroine with gender fluidity in Xu's retelling has been considerably weakened by asserting masculinity and negating the femininity of the heroine during her cross-dressing journey.

Xu's play probably demonstrates a story about a subversive heroine, but this does not mean that Xu asserts woman's rights or that his play brings gender equality to light in pre-modern China. According to Lin Zhao-lan, Xu Wei's concept about women transcends that of his contemporaries, and when most of the scholars in his time believe women should be submissive and passive, Xu abhors the mainstream and is particularly against the feudal concept, such as the belief "a woman without talent is a virtuous woman" (31-2). In his two cross-dressing plays, Xu demonstrates that a talented woman can also be virtuous. His assertion about the heroines' achievements in the male realm is the reason that critics praise his contribution to woman's rights and gender equality. However, the achievements of the two cross-dressing heroines can be fulfilled only under the disguise of male identity and their total abandonment of femininity. If they did not sacrifice their femininity, it would be impossible for them to practice their strength and wisdom. If the retelling offers no room for the cross-dressing heroine to perform her femininity in the male realm, this suggests that the gender performance of the heroine is based on social norms.

Also, Xu's emphasis on chastity and his allocation of marriage as the heroine's final destiny make it impossible for the heroine to obtain subjective agency. Chastity is the most highly valued virtue for females in male-dominated China in Xu's time, and this is so in both of Xu's cross-dressing plays. When Mulan tells her parents of her decision to join the war in her father's place, what worries her mother is not if she can survive on the battlefield but how she can keep her secret and maintain her virginity. Her mother does not agree to let her go until Mulan promises to come back as a virgin. The worry about

Mulan's chastity rather than her life can certainly mean that Mulan's mother is confident in her martial skill, but it can also reflect the concept that chastity is regarded as more important than life for women in a feudal society. Furthermore, as Chen Ai-ting aptly observes, the most important task in the army for Mulan is to maintain her chastity (134). When heading for the army, she describes keeping her secret safe among male soldiers is like suffering between fire and water (水火煎敖) and she has to think some practical tricks in order to maintain her chastity. It is not evident how and what tricks she uses in the army, but through the conversation of her comrades it is clear that Mulan must be very cautious and determined to keep her gender identity a secret.

According to her comrades, Mulan is a noble man because she always hides herself when she goes to the toilet. Different from the other soldiers, who are open in daily life, Mulan's prudent behaviour is misinterpreted by her comrades, who conclude she is rare and must be a distinguished man. To disclose her gender identity might entail endangering her life because in using a false identity to join the army she has committed the crime of cheating the emperor, which was punishable by death in feudal China. Moreover, in Xu's play the danger of being exposed is also implicitly linked with the loss of virginity. When returning home triumphantly, Mulan, as Hsiung suggests, is proud that she kept her promise to her mother and returned home as a virgin (79). She claims that she is still "an unbloomed lotus bud," the metaphor for a virgin, and that "she would never shame her parents." She compares herself to "a lily in muddy water" and is prouder of what she has endured in keeping her virginity for twelve years than of the great accomplishments she achieved.

It is not really surprising that chastity, apart from filial piety and loyalty, becomes the virtue the heroine has to accomplish in Xu's revision. During the Ming Dynasty, the concept of chastity for women becomes more prevalent due to imperial encouragement. No matter how subversive and anti-traditional Xu seems to be, his work is still shaped by dominant contemporary thinking. As many critics have pointed out, Xu himself visits brothels frequently but he slaughters his wife only because he suspects her chastity. He can be unfaithful to his wife, but her alleged affair deserves death. According to T'ien Ju-K'ang, the first emperor of the Ming Dynasty, Zu Yuanzhang, strongly advocates the concept of chastity for women in society because he believes the convention of remarriage for women in the previous Yuan Dynasty encourages marital infidelity and should be eradicated from society (2). Since Zu's time the women who remain lifelong widows after

their husbands' deaths are greatly praised by officials and authorities, and the names of those virtuous women "[are] also listed in the Veritable Records (the Imperial Chronicle) and given equal importance with other significant political events" (3). To quote Chen Ai-ting again, from the imperial palace to the provincial governments, there was a state machine producing chaste women in the Ming Dynasty (136).

Furthermore, fidelity for women is regarded as a virtue equivalent to loyalty for men in feudal China. As the famous Chinese maxim goes, "a loyal subordinate would not serve two emperors; a chaste woman would not marry a second husband." A virtuous woman is a woman who can keep her virginity before marriage and maintain fidelity in marriage. Even though Xu is strongly against the dominant concepts about women in his time, he cannot really escape and is still influenced by the deeply-rooted patriarchal thinking of feudal China. That is why the most important mission for his Mulan in the army is to maintain her virginity. If she loses her virginity, she can no longer qualify as a virtuous woman. As long as she is still a virgin, she is virtuous and will be praised by her society when she returns home. Most important of all, she is still marriageable in the marriage market even though she loses her youth in the battlefield. In Xu's play, virginity is the key whether Mulan can return to patriarchal society.

As mentioned earlier, Xu's play is the first Mulan story ending with the marriage of the heroine, with a connotation that marriage is the destiny for all women without considering their differences. However, critics, such as Lin Zhao-lan, and Huang Li-zhen, also suggest that Xu's conception of the marriage plot actually follows the traditional reunion and happy ending of the opera convention. In his book *Opera Aesthetics*, Fu Jin argues that Chinese audiences dislike the reproduction of real life suffering in art; on the contrary, they prefer art with a happy reunion ending which will allow them to go back home in a good mood, and this particular art is Opera (144). Marriage is one of the most common expressions in representing a happy ending in opera tradition. In Xu's opera version, the theme of marriage not only appears at the end in conformity with traditional opera convention, but is actually reinforced from the beginning of the play, which literally turns the unconventional heroine's story into something less unconventional.

When Mulan is unbinding her feet and prepares to put on male shoes, the concern of marriage comes to her mind. She "for a moment is worried about decreasing her desirability, but she soon comforts herself with a home remedy that will make her feet even smaller." Women with small feet are considered to be sexy and charming in feudal China and thus more marriageable. Similar to Mulan's mother, who is concerned more about her

chastity than her life, Mulan also worries about her desirability. Chastity and desirability are more important than life for the heroine in the play, which also foretells that the ending for the unconventional heroine will be a traditional one. While Mulan is away on the battlefield, a young man called Wang Lang from her neighborhood learns her story and is touched by her filial act. He hence approaches her parents with an offer of marriage with Mulan. Wang later passes the imperial examination and is appointed as a high-ranking governor by the Emperor. Towards the end of the story, Mulan's parents wish desperately that she can come back home earlier and be married to Wang as soon as possible so that their wish can be fulfilled and they can "die cleanly" (死得乾淨) without any regret. Once again, they do not seem to worry about Mulan's life; instead, they worry more about her marriage. On the day of Mulan's return home, Wang visits and congratulates Mulan on her triumph in the battlefield. Due to her parents' insistence, they get married later on the same day. Why does a heroine with masculine attributes have to be married off right after she returns home, the home of her parents? Returning home signifies Mulan's return to patriarchal society and that the danger of instability brought to the society by Mulan's cross-dressing, as many critics argue, has been eradicated. However, it is not sufficient for Mulan to return to the home of her parents in Xu's retelling. Mulan has to return to the home of her husband, where a woman is regulated to perform the most important virtue of women in Xu's time.

In the Ming Dynasty, when chastity is regarded as the most important virtue for women, it is not possible for a woman to become a model for other women unless to some extent she manifests her chastity. Thus, she has to establish her own home with another man in order to perform chastity. She has to be filial to her parents, loyal to her emperor and chaste to her husband, and then she can be qualified as a model for women in China. Disguising as a man and joining the war is for her to prove the virtues of filial piety and loyalty; maintaining virginity is for her to manifest chastity. Getting married provides her with another chance to perform filial piety and chastity. Mulan's engagement with Wang is decided by her parents without her knowledge. Her docile and submissive attitude towards the arranged marriage, and her willingness to follow her parents' wish and to marry Wang on the very day of her return home, provide a "correct" demonstration of femininity in Confucian society.

Xu's Mulan, though seemingly rebellious, is a Confucian heroine. After returning home her performance of femininity conforms even more with the regulated norms than it did

before she headed for the army. In Hsiung's terms, she becomes "even more feminine and conventional" (78). Before putting on male disguise, she acts on her own and determines to join the war on behalf of her father without having discussion with her parents in advance. Performing a higher level of subjective agency, she is constructed as independent and capable of taking action. In contrast, her docile and submissive image represents her as a traditional female, who apparently lacks agency, after she resumes the female role. Also, when Mulan encounters Wang Lang – her husband-to-be and an imperial governor, the symbol of patriarchy – she behaves bashfully by turning her back toward him, performing a traditionally feminine conduct. Mulan's responding in a bashful manner when meeting her husband-to-be is a "standard" feminine gesture the actress poses in opera performance. It is a common gesture for the heroines to perform femininity, particularly in the love-courting opera. The stress on traditional femininity at the end of Xu's retelling in reality conforms to the opera tradition, and also, more importantly, signifies that it is impossible for the heroine to escape Confucian regulations.

Although written by a subversive and rebellious writer, Xu's play still cannot attribute the heroine with subjective agency at the end as it once did at the outset of the story. The heroine's potential for performing gender against social norms has been greatly limited by both the deeply-rooted Confucian ideology of the story and the genre conventions of opera. However, as Hsiung suggests, Xu's Mulan can be regarded "as further testing the gender fluidity and acting as [a] member of a new social order in the making" (89). Indeed, the masculine attributes Xu's Mulan performs before going to the war does throw a fresh light on gender fluidity in the Mulan story. Perhaps because this is the first opera retelling or because the unelaborated possibility of gender fluidity invites more explorations, Xu's play later becomes the pre-text of the opera versions, as well as some retellings for young adults, for the Mulan story in the 20th century.

Three Novels in the Qing Dynasty: A Virtuous Model for Women in China

The following three novels about the Mulan story are all written in the Qing Dynasty (AD 1644-1911). Due to the genre conventions of novel, the story about the legendary Mulan will be told in more detail, providing the reader with a chance to catch a glimpse of the cross-dressing life of Mulan. As the other retellings, the three novels also transmit certain values and assumptions of the time they are produced; by looking at the innovations they make to the Mulan story, the implicit dominant ideology of the Qing Dynasty will be disclosed. The Qing Dynasty, the last imperial dynasty in China, was the second time in

Chinese history that China was ruled by non-Han people. The rulers of the Qing Dynasty, the Manchu ethnic group, came from the northern part of China and have a quite different culture from the Han people. The emperors of the Qing followed the old rules and regulations from the previous Ming Dynasty and practiced Han culture for political purposes. By doing so, they could rule the Han people more easily and integrate into the Han culture in a more efficient way. Neo-Confucianism was the main stream in educational and political systems; the practice of rites, the obedience to the emperor in particular, was strictly enforced. As critics (Yue Jihui, Guo Houan, Yue Fuji, Pan Ce, 1991) point out, Confucianism starts merging with religions between the 3rd and the 7th centuries, a time when Daoism springs up and Buddhism comes to China. From that time, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism exclude one another but at the same time combine with one another (369). The integration of the three doctrines, as well as the extreme loyalty to the emperor, is reflected in the three novels.

According to Jia Wenzhao and Xu Zhaoxun, the Chinese classical novel is developed in the Tang Dynasty although it has undergone a long period of germination (4), and it reaches its peak when the greatest novel, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, is published in the Qing Dynasty (10). The Chinese classical novel can be classified into several subgenres, such as historical novel, heroic legend, tales of mystery and the supernatural, and tales of a gifted scholar meeting a fair lady, and so on. Zhang Jun divides the history of the novel in the Qing Dynasty into four periods: the change of Ming and Qing Dynasties from AD 1627 to AD 1661; the early Qing period from AD 1662 to AD 1735; the middle Qing period from AD 1736 to AD 1840; and the late Qing period from AD 1840 to AD 1900 (4). The three novels about Mulan published in the Qing Dynasty are located in different periods. Although they have some shared common features, they differ from one another in many ways.

The first novel about Mulan is probably *Sui Tang Yan Yi* (The History of the Sui and Tang Dynasties) from the early Qing period though it is not really about the heroic story of Mulan. Drawing on several Ming Dynasty novels and folktales, the famous Qing novelist Chu Renhuo (who died around 1681) writes *Sui Tang Yan Yi*, covering the history from the rise of the first emperor Wen Di of the Sui Dynasty (AD 589) to the death of the emperor Xuan Zong of the Tang Dynasty (AD 762). This novel is generally regarded as a historical novel; it has long been praised for its depictions of the heroes in Wagang Stockade. In the novel, Mulan is just a petty player in this immense history because her story occupies only five chapters out of the one-hundred-chapter novel, and her eventual suicide (to preserve

her chastity) at her father's tomb removes the story from the regular Mulan narrative.

The second novel published in the middle Qing period is called *The Legendary Story of Mulan* or *The Legendary Story of a Girl Who Is Loyal, Filial, Heroic, and Chaste*. It is not clear who the author is, but some believe it is written by a scholar named Ma Zu in the Qing Dynasty; however, no proof of this has been found to date. As the name of the title suggests, this will be a story about a virtuous Chinese girl, who probably has to sacrifice every thing she has in order to perform Confucian virtues. The third novel, *The Legendary Story of a Filial and Heroic Girl from the Northern Wei*, is written by Zhang Shaoxian in AD 1850, the late Qing Period. This retelling basically follows the storyline of Xu Wei's opera, in which Mulan joins the army to fight against bandits rather than a non-Han ethnic group outside China. Probably due to the popularity of tales of mystery and the supernatural in the Ming and Qing periods, both Zhang's Mulan and her counterpart in the anonymous retelling are assisted by spirits and magic powers during their cross-dressing journeys.

As Neo-Confucianism is the dominant ideology of the time the three novels are written, it is predictable that it might be very unlikely for the Mulan retellings to break the Confucian metanarrative of the Mulan story. In this section, I will explore how the gender construction is represented in the genre of the novel, and how Mulan's gender performance is linked with performance of virtue. The following discussion will be divided into four parts: (1) the 'leaving home' motif, consisting of the representations of Mulan and her father; (2) the process for leaving home, in which I will look at the crucial moment when Mulan makes the decision to join the war and her preparation before leaving home; (3) army career, in which Mulan's gender performance and the danger of being exposed in her army career will be explored; and finally (4) returning home, containing the analyses of how Mulan resumes the female role and the various endings in the three novels.

The 'Leaving Home' Motif

The leaving home motif consists of investigations of the image of the father figure and the representation of the heroine, particularly at the outset of the novel. An ageing and sick father is the basic catalyst in the Mulan story because his weakness has a strong connection with the heroine's agency. Quite different from most of the father figures in Chinese literature, who hold positions of authority and take charge of negotiations between the family and the outside world, Mulan's father is incapable of doing these tasks and is, on the contrary, in need of protection. The images of father figures in the three novels are not

really the same. Although they are similarly old and sick, each is attributed with a different level of weakness.

In Chu's novel, Mulan's father is Han but later moves to the territory of Tu Jue, a nation which lived in northern China in ancient times. The King of Tu Jue is asked to send troops to help the Li clan to set up a new dynasty, the Tang Dynasy (AD 618-907), so Mulan's father is recruited into the army. When Mulan's mother suggests that they can pay money and ask to be exempt from the military service, he refuses and speaks in a stern way. He declares that there will be no army in the nation if most of the soldiers employ the same way to escape their duty and also that their family does not have the money. He finally agrees to allow his tomboy daughter to join the war because she is determined to do it her own way. Chu's father does not appear to be very weak. He might be physically weak, but he is represented as having a strong mind.

The father in the anonymous novel perhaps is the strongest father in terms of both physical and mental strength in the Mulan retellings. He holds a military position, but happens to be very sick when the war takes place. He agrees almost at once when Mulan proposes to take his place on the battlefield because he recalls the dream he had before Mulan was born. In the dream, he was told by a god that his future daughter, Mulan, was an immortal and that she would gain unusual merit and perform outstanding filial piety. He has no doubt that Mulan will achieve extraordinary deeds on the battlefield. With these alterations, his decision to let her join the army does not look like a compelled one at all. He does not suffer from the moral dilemma as the other father figures do; on the contrary, he is more than happy to let Mulan complete her mission entrusted by the Heavens. However, if her story has already been set before she is born, it is almost impossible for her to develop subjective agency.

The father in Zhang's novel is probably the weakest father assigned to Mulan in any retelling of her story. A duplicate version of the father in Xu's opera, Zhang has depicted this father as even weaker and more cowardly. Just as Mulan's father in Xu's opera is so anxious about the recruitment that he almost hangs himself, so too is the father in Zhang's story. The novel provides a fuller description of the father's impotence, however. "When Hua Hu receives the military order, he is struck dumb with fear, hanging his head with dismay. Stupefied with terror, he finds nothing he can do about it. He cries out loud to his wife (花弧把催帖一看，嚇得目瞪口呆，垂頭喪氣，呆呆想了半晌，夫妻倆口無可奈何，只是嚎啕大哭起來。) (5). He counts the days before joining the army and keeps telling

Mulan that he has only one or two more days left in his life. Interestingly, Mulan's initial response to the imperial recruitment is as weak as her father; this will be discussed in the section about the process for leaving home. Generally speaking, there seems to be a parallel description between father and Mulan in the beginning of the three novels. As Chu's father and Mulan both have strong minds, Mulan and her father in the anonymous novel are equipped with strong physical and mental strength. Similarly, Zhang's Mulan is as fragile as her impotent father. Although the gender constructions of the three heroines at the initial stage are represented in various ways, they are all born or raised to be very different from traditional ordinary women.

Chu has modified the story so that Mulan's father decides to raise her as a boy because she cries as loud as a male baby when she is born. He teaches her archery and martial arts from early childhood. Mulan is also fond of reading books about war plans, but she detests the female tasks of sewing and weaving. Furthermore, she refuses marriage when her parents try to find her a husband. She is a girl with masculine strength and spirit. Literally speaking, she is taught to be masculine because she has been raised as a boy. She is a pseudo man. The modifications Chu makes here will lessen the potential of the heroine to perform against social norms. Although she seemingly acts anti-traditionally, what she does is still based on practices taught by her father, a patriarchal figure.

As an immortal and born with a mission, Mulan in the second novel manifests her exceptional talents at a very young age. She comprehends the doctrines of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism when she is only five years old. She disguises herself as a boy in order to listen to a Buddhist lecture by a famous monk, who later becomes her teacher, at the age of eight. The cross-dressing experience at childhood denotes that she might have subjective agency, courage, and ability to act against social norms. However, the debut of Mulan, which stresses her development in moral virtue more than her gender performance, gives the impression that this will be a story about a perfect "man" rather than a story about a legendary cross-dressing girl.

Derived from Xu's heroine, Zhang's Mulan is depicted as more talented and feminine but with less masculine spirit at the beginning of the novel. She is a woman of many talents: she is good at sewing and weaving, fond of reading all kinds of books, skilled in martial arts and military strategy. She is a girl who can master both feminine and masculine tasks. In Zhang's description, "she is as beautiful as flower and jade but with great strength in her arms" (這一個如花似玉的女子，兩膀偏有無窮的臂力。) (4). She has feminine features

and attributes but with masculine strength. Although she has masculine strength, she does not seem to possess masculine spirit. Furthermore, when the story starts, she is already engaged to Wan Qingyun, a young man from her village, a modification which, in combination with the image of a feminine heroine, implicitly denotes that this story will conclude with the heroine's return to her husband's home.

Compared with the beginning of the ballad, in which the heroine is depicted as an ordinary girl from an ordinary family, the three novels all construct the heroine as exceptional at the outset and suggest that she will become "somebody" later in the story. In the ballad, Mulan performs ordinariness and femininity through the continuously daily weaving routine; her female identity is constructed through the reiteration of a gendered act — a very ordinary female chore. Although gender construction in the three novels more or less denotes that gender is constructed, the emphasis on the heroine's inborn capabilities and uniqueness might lead to the conclusion that gender fluidity is impossible for ordinary people.

The Process for Leaving Home

In this section I will look at two crucial moments within the "process for leaving home": when Mulan makes her decision to join the war and her preparation before leaving home. What is of most concern to Mulan when she makes the decision point to the main themes of the story, as well as to the implicit ideology and assumptions of the time when the novel was composed? Second, Mulan's preparation before leaving home usually signifies a transition from her abandonment of femininity to her acquisition of masculinity. By investigating her change in gender performance, I will explore how gender is constructed for the heroine and the extent to which the novel, as a more detailed genre, provides the heroine with a higher level of subjective agency and hence enables her to demonstrate gender fluidity and gender acts against social norms.

Mulan's motives for leaving home may be contextualized by considering how the narrative of leaving-home and commencing a journey is represented in Chinese literature. Unlike the Western leaving-home story, in which the hero embarks upon a journey in order to explore selfhood and consequently gains knowledge and power, classical Chinese literature tends to present the journey as a way through which the hero will obtain honor and fortune for himself and *his family*.[7] Although the protagonist's acquirement of

[7] Joseph Campbell, though, argues that the mythic hero in Western literature does obtain a benefit for his

knowledge and power may come with fame and fortune, his bringing honor to family seldom becomes the main theme in western leaving-home stories. Bringing honor to one's family and ancestors is one of the main filial practices in Confucian society. To cite Zengzi's words again, the highest level of filial piety is to honor parents through one's achievements (Yao, 203). A common leaving-home tale in classical Chinese literature is usually about a poor young scholar who leaves home to attend the imperial examination, the only pathway to officialdom for scholars in pre-modern China. Once he passes the exam, he will be assigned a position within officialdom and the social status of his family will be elevated at once. Passing the imperial examination will bring honor and fortune to one's family; it is regarded as the best way for men to perform filial piety in feudal China. Hence, seeking for an official position and material gain becomes a common motive for the hero to undergo a leaving-home journey in classical Chinese literature.

There is also another way to bring honor to one's family in feudal China. For those who are well-versed in martial arts, joining the army and protecting the state can lead to fame and fortune as well. In Confucian society, fame and fortune often come as a reward for loyalty to the emperor. Joining the army and protecting national borders is a way to perform one's loyalty to the emperor in ancient times. If Mulan can fight back invaders and therefore the peace in her state will be maintained, she performs not only filial piety towards her father but also loyalty to the emperor. In consequence, she can bring honor and fortune to her family as a son can. So, the Mulan story can be regarded as a cross-dressing version of a female military officer's leaving home story. In the male military officer's story, the protagonist is usually depicted as leaving home with high aspirations; the three novels, interestingly, give Mulan very different portrayals when she leaves home. I will begin with her response to imperial recruitment.

Mulan in Chu's version responds rather calmly when she knows her father is in the recruitment list. She at once thinks of the woman warriors in history and is pondering on the possibility for her to join the war. Her calm and ambitious response demonstrates she is a girl with masculine spirit. In the second novel, Mulan, as an immortal being, does not need to be told that her father will be recruited in the army; she predicts from her father's dream about what will happen one year earlier before the war. She cries silently, and from that moment she practices riding and archery privately. Compared to Chu's heroine, who shows masculine attributes and seems to perform a higher level of agency, Mulan in the

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community at the end of his journey. See Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces.* 3rd Ed. California: New World Library, (year).

anonymous novel is depicted as more like a Confucian girl. While the sacrifice of the heroine in Chu's novel does not really seem to be a real sacrifice, Mulan in the second novel thinks only of her father rather than self accomplishments when she makes the decision. In Zhang's novel, the heroine's initial response to imperial recruitment is depicted in a dramatic way, which gives the impression that the heroine is weak and traditionally feminine. "When Hua Mulan hears of the recruitment, she trembles all over and cannot utter even a sound…she is so frightened that her pink face turns yellow" (花木蘭聽說，嚇得滿身發抖，不能出聲…嚇得粉面焦黃) (5). She seems to be easily scared; however, after thinking for a whole night, she finds a solution in which she can perform filial piety and loyalty, and more importantly maintain chastity. In the three novels, the heroines' initial responses to the recruitment explicitly denote that their gender representations are various and implicitly suggest that they are attributed with different levels of subjective agency. While the heroines in the second and the third novels seem to behave more according to Confucian teaching, the heroine in the first novel aims very high, signifying she has a higher potential in exceeding the regulations of patriarchy.

As they are portrayed variously in their responses to imperial recruitment, the three heroines encounter varying levels of difficulty in persuading their parents after making the decision. Difficulty in persuading family members also signifies the feasibility of the cross-dressing plan. The difficulty the heroine has in persuading her parents is more or less linked with the danger of being exposed in the army. There is a tendency that if the heroine persuades her parents without much effort, she tends to encounter less difficulty in protecting her secret later in her army career. The heroine in the anonymous version has no problem in persuading her parents as her father is aware that going to the war is the mission Mulan has to complete. Mulan in Chu's retelling employs a more strategic way: she dresses herself as a male soldier when other comrades arrive at their home to pick her father up. She tells them that her father is too old and that she will take his place. It is too late for her father to stop her. It looks more like that he has no choice but to let her leave home with them. Zhang's Mulan, after failing to persuade her parents, threatens to commit suicide in order to gain permission to leave for the battlefield. This innovation in the Mulan story has the apparent consequence that Zhang's Mulan is bound to face lots of difficulties in protecting her secret, or her chastity, which she is determined to defend.

Before leaving home, it is also important for the heroine to acquire masculine attributes, or learn to behave like a man, in the three novels. The preparation for heading

for the battlefield is the process for negating femininity and acquiring masculinity. Following Xu's Mulan, the heroines in Chu's and Zhang's novels also have bound feet. In order to ride on a horse and walk like men, they have to unwrap their bound feet, the symbol of femininity and sexual desirability in patriarchal China. Women with bound feet perform the swaying kind of effect when they walk in tiny steps, which were deemed to be sexually appealing and to denote an erotic effect for men in feudal China. Bound feet can also limit a woman's mobility as women cannot walk steadily and therefore cannot walk very far from home. With bound feet, women are constrained at home and not allowed to join the outside world. Hence, unwrapping the feet not only symbolizes the abandonment of the traditional femininity constructed under patriarchal system, but also means the regaining of freedom, mobility, and agency.

The motif of unwrapping the bound feet is presented differently in the two novels. Chu's Mulan is happy that her bound feet are not too small and that she only needs to stuff some foot bandage in the boots, and in this way she can walk steadily like a man. She is so proud of her male disguise that she believes it makes her appear to be the image of a real general in the army. Contrary to traditional Chinese women, who prefer to have feet as small as possible, Chu's Mulan is happy that her feet are not too small and she does not need to take much effort to walk like a man. She does not care about losing her femininity; on the contrary, she is happy with her male look. In Zhang's version, the bound foot is linked with marriage as it is in Xu's opera. Mulan hesitates to unwrap her feet when thinking about marriage in the opera version. In the novel, when Mulan's maid hears that she decides to unwrap the feet, the maid bursts out laughing immediately as she cannot imagine how women could get married if they have a pair of big feet. Bound feet also symbolize desirability in the marriage market; unwrapping the feet means the loss of charm and value in marriage. The very different attitudes toward unwrapping the bound foot once again reveal the two heroines are constructed in very different ways. While Chu's Mulan is more than happy to violate social regulations, Zhang's Mulan appears to have no other choice but to do so.

Mulan in the anonymous version, on the other hand, does not show any feeling about her disguise. She shaves her hair at the temples, takes off her earrings, and puts on the helmet, armour and boots. Wearing earrings and the hair on the temples is a way of performing femininity in ancient times. She has to abandon femininity before performing masculinity. In all three novels, interestingly, the heroine is depicted as acquiring masculinity as soon as she puts on male clothes even though she has not previously learned

how to behave like a man. In the novels, clothes function as social norms because they efficiently regulate the heroines' gender performance, and to some extent suggesting that gender is constructed.

Army Career

In the ballad the account of the heroine's 10-year life in the army is relatively short in comparison to the domestic life in the story. The lack of details of Mulan's army career is because the main theme of the ballad is not about war, and the lack of details, also due to the conventions of ballad, can increase the mysterious effect of the legendary tale. However, retelling the Mulan story in the more extended narrative form of a novel entails a much more detailed account of Mulan's army life and the challenge of carrying out her cross-dressing plan in the male realm. In this section, the discussion will focus on the dangers of being exposed encountered by Mulan and the extent to which she violates social norms. The representations of these facets of her experience will enable some judgments about the extent to which the three novels attribute the heroine with more freedom in performing gender.

Coincidentally, the three novels all depict that the greatest danger of being exposed happens when the heroine meets another woman. This is not to say that it is comparatively easy for women to pierce Mulan's male disguise, but to say that the story tends to describe how Mulan and the other woman make a good match, implying that Mulan's performance of masculinity is by no means inferior to that of any male soldiers. Usually, Mulan and the other woman share some similarities or have equal talents. It is often that she is attracted by Mulan's good-looking appearance or merits and later Mulan will be asked to marry her. Being asked to marry a woman proves Mulan's cross-dressing performance is successful, but it ironically places the heroine in the greatest danger of being exposed. However, Mulan always avoids the danger successfully and even develops a sisterly relationship with this other woman. Basically, the other woman functions as a counterpart of Mulan, but the difference is that she does not put her gender identity in disguise, which implicitly suggests that she has a higher subjective agency in performing gender. She also serves as a trial that Mulan has to undergo, a trial to test to what extent Mulan violates social regulations.

In Chu's novel, Mulan fights only one battle, in which she defeats lots of male soldiers but is at the end captured by a group of female soldiers. Before too long Mulan reveals her gender identity to the female general, who is very impressed by Mulan's good looks. Exposing her gender identity while in the army, particularly in front of a male

general, can place Mulan's life or chastity at risk; however, exposing her gender identity to a female general might evoke her compassion and thus enable Mulan to elude the death penalty. In Chu's variation of the story, Mulan decides to stay on the battlefield and joins the group of female soldiers, a group of social outcasts who enjoy individual freedom.

In the anonymous version, Mulan attracts the lady not because of her pretty looks but because of her virtue. This apparently links with the main themes of the novel as it intends to construct Mulan as a "perfect" human being according to Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist philosophies. A young lady named Hwa A Zhen, who practices Buddhism profoundly, is forced into marriage by her brother. She declares that she will not marry anyone except General Hua. The military consultant of the army receives an appeal from A Zhen's brother so he commands Mulan to marry A Zhen. Mulan has no choice but to allow A-Zhen to stay with the army. She tells A Zhen that they will get married after the war, and meanwhile they discuss Buddhism together whenever Mulan has time. A Zhen is the symbol of chastity, a moral value which is also emphasized in the story. Mulan is once told by her Buddhist teacher that she is immortal and that she should behave like a first-class woman, who most values chastity. Chastity here is different from that in other Mulan retellings because it actually means keeping virginity till death for a spiritual purpose rather than preserving virginity for her future husband. Mulan's engagement to A Zhen does not disclose her secret; on the contrary, it brings her a like-minded friend. Having a friend like A Zhen, symbol of chastity, Mulan will be able to keep virginity for a spiritual purpose until the end of her life.

Compared to the previous two novels, in which the sexual desire of the female is not obvious, Zhang's version has a clearer description of a different women's desire for Mulan. This is perhaps because Zhang's novel is produced at a time when pornography was widely circulating in China. Thus in Zhang's retelling Mulan meets two talented female generals, who form a sharp contrast, from the enemy camp; both women are charmed by her pretty looks and achievements. The first woman Mulan encounters is Princess Lu Wanhua, whose competence in martial skills is equal to Mulan's, and she is also a woman of wit and intelligence. When the war reaches a stalemate, Mulan is trapped by a captain from her own camp and sent to the enemy camp to persuade them to surrender. The military consultant in the enemy camp recognizes Mulan as a talented general and wants to keep her in their side. He employs "the strategy of beauty" by suggesting Mulan marry Princess Wanhua. After failing to turn down the marriage proposal, Mulan marries Wanhua, who is very satisfied with their marriage and believes that having a husband like Mulan she can

die without regret. On the wedding night when they are alone in the wedding chamber, Mulan mentions about the practice of propriety (li) and hence persuades Wanhua to postpone their real wedding night till they meet Mulan's parents after the war. By employing the doctrine of propriety, Mulan successfully escapes the danger of being exposed on the first night of her married life.

However, she is unable to keep her secret any longer the next day. In the celebration party Mulan is drunk under the table so Wanhua has a chance to look at her "husband" in detail. She is shocked to find the holes for ear-rings pierced in Mulan's ear lobes and becomes even more alarmed when she finds out Mulan does not have a protruding larynx. Wanhua is a typical Confucian girl, the type of woman who believes marriage is the destiny for all women and who will always follow the man she marries. In her worried state, she looks at Mulan again in detail and "felt her sexual urge was getting stronger and stronger" (不覺情慾勃勃) (112). Wanhua's desire for Mulan overcomes her suspicion of Mulan's gender; namely, Wanhua's female sexual desire takes priority over her keen sense as a warrior. Even though she is already suspicious about Mulan's gender identity, Wanhua is unwilling to accept the possible truth from the bottom of her heart and her sexual impulse is unconsciously stirred up. Wanhua's desire for Mulan can probably be interpreted as her desire for marriage, the desire for home where all women should be settled according to Confucian teaching. Because her desire for marriage is under the regulations of social norms, Wanhua is granted a happy ending in Zhang's novel. However, the other female general has a totally different destiny.

Queen Miao Fongxian is portrayed as an innately aberrant lady, who employs sorcery on the battlefield. Apart from the magic weapon she has, she is not qualified as a warrior at all. She is charmed by Mulan's beauty and falls in love with "him" at first sight. The first time Fongxian sees Mulan, she at once decides to capture Mulan in order to get married with "him" even though she is the wife to the leader of the bandits. Her lust for Mulan is depicted clearly. "When the evil idea comes in to her mind, Miao Fongxian feels her body is burned by the sudden impulse and she almost loses control of herself" (苗鳳仙邪念一起，遍身慾火如焚，哪裡按耐得住) (194). Although Wanhua and Fongxian have similar sexual desires for Mulan, they differ in their loyalty to marriage. While Wanhua is willing to follow her husband until death, Fongxian is thinking to re-marry when she sees someone who is superior to her incumbent husband. As a sexually loose woman, Fongxian is later killed by the cross-dressing Mulan. An unchaste woman like Fongxian is destined to be

expelled from society. By allocating Mulan with the task of terminating the life of an unchaste woman, the novel implicitly suggests that chastity is the essential virtue a woman should have and that Mulan is a follower of Confucian doctrine.

Besides chastity, the concept of marriage as the destiny for women has been reinforced in Zhang's version; Mulan even employs the concept to save her own life when her secret is disclosed. To begin with, the first time Mulan encounters Wanhua on the battlefield, she tries to reason with Wanhua about the priority in life for women. She advises Wanhua, "I think you are not married yet. Why did you submit yourself to the bandits and revolts against the imperial dynasty? Your marriage will be delayed" (我看你未出閣女子，爲什麼順從山賊造反？豈不誤了你的終身大事！) (82). She urges Wanhua to surrender as soon as possible in order to have a happy ending in life. It is ironical for Mulan to persuade Wanhua to place marriage as the top priority in life because she is doing something opposite. Mulan argues from a traditional point of view that the battlefield is the territory for men and home/marriage is the place for women. After performing as a man for several years in the army, Mulan perhaps simply believes that no woman should appear on the frontline and recalls that her participation in the war is not out of choice. In either case, Mulan's words reflect the deep concept about women in Confucian heterosexual society—what women want is marriage. The first time Mulan's strategy of marriage does not move Wanhua to surrender; however, it works the second time.

When Mulan's secret is disclosed, she has no choice but to explain why she takes male disguise and joins the war. Wanhua is at once moved by Mulan's filial behaviour, but at the same time Wanhua laments her misfortunes as her wish of marrying a fine man is thwarted. In order to persuade Wanhua to surrender and serve for the imperial army, Mulan offers to "share" her husband with Wanhua. More astonishingly, she even proposes that she will give the first wife position to Wanhua and she will be happy to be the second wife to "their" husband. As Feng Lan notes, "Mulan's promise is an extremely unusual sacrifice, because in the hierarchical society of pre-modern China, a society in which a person's *mingfen* or social status is more important than the person's life, a 'second' wife is no more than a concubine" (235). Sharing her husband with Wanhua is a strategy to meet rival claims for Mulan. She can, on the one hand, escape death penalty, and on the other hand wins a talented woman warrior for the imperial state. Her sacrifice serves the patriarchy to an extreme: she not only wins a talented woman warrior for her army but also finds a fine

and chaste wife for her husband.

Mulan's successful performance of extreme filial piety can be achieved through her own effort; however, her success in performing extreme loyalty also relies on Wanhua's help. To be more precise, it depends on how much Wanhua has internalized the traditional values for women. When Mulan proposes that Wanhua marry her husband, Wanhua at once expresses her will to surrender and promises to help the imperial army. She is suddenly revived from her grief and becomes very wise and resourceful. The strategy of beauty used by the military consultant in the bandit camp fails to win Mulan over; ironically, the strategy of gentleman employed by Mulan successfully persuades Wanhua to stand on the imperial army's side. If Wanhua were not traditional in thought and behaviour, Mulan's strategy would fail and she would face the danger of losing her life. It is because Wanhua places marriage as the top priority in her life that Mulan can easily win her over and hence have the chance to perform the virtue of extreme loyalty. Exposing her gender identity to a female counterpart does not endanger her life; instead, Mulan wins a very crucial companion on the battlefield. Under Wanhua's thoughtful arrangement, Mulan "disguises" herself as a female and safely returns to the imperial army. The floating gender identities Mulan performs help her to trick male bandits and therefore escape the risk of losing her life. Although floating gender identities are not the fluidity in gender identity suggested by Judith Butler, performing different gender identities in this case does attribute Mulan with a higher level of agency and individual freedom.

With Zhang's invention, Mulan faces the danger of being exposed again when her fiancée, a talented imperial officer Wang Qinyun, is appointed as the supervisor of the army at the front line. As a captain in the imperial army, it is inevitable that Mulan will meet her husband-to-be, who symbolizes patriarchal law and the home Mulan is destined to return to. When facing him, she is so embarrassed that she dares not raise her head and answer his questions. In ancient China, an engaged couple are not supposed to meet each other before they get married. Disguising as a male soldier for several years, Mulan performs masculinity perfectly without any flaws. However, when her husband-to-be appears, she forgets the masculine behaviour she has long been practicing in the army and becomes very shy and feminine. In his presence, she immediately returns to the traditional and easily-scared Mulan before she joins the war. Her sudden performance of femininity when she is still in male disguise does not suggest that there is a possibility of gender fluidity in Zhang's Mulan retelling; on the contrary, her incapability of performing masculinity conveys that her cross-dressing journey is temporary and she will eventually

resume a female role.

Overall, Mulan's performance of femininity is represented as a sharp contrast to her performance of masculinity in Zhang's retelling. That is to say, she is either very feminine or very masculine. She can be easily thrown into panic when she puts on female clothes, and she can also be very macho to behead enemies without blinking her eyes even in her first battle. She can perform gender competently according to the situations, or according to the roles she is regulated to perform. In contrast to Zhang's retelling, the other two novels place less emphasis on the heroine's gender performance. In Chu's *Sui Tang Yan Yi*, Mulan is only a minor character joining the army for a rather short period of time so there is not much depiction of how she performs gender. Although she has a masculine ambition at the outset, the story represents her dream as merely a dream, which indicates that crossing the gender boundary is prohibited. The anonymous version, focusing on Confucian virtues, seeks to construct Mulan as "a perfect man" or "a perfect human being" based on Confucian doctrines. With an emphasis on Confucian virtues, the heroine's gender performance has been rendered opaque and unimportant, thereby suggesting that the potential of acting against social norms for the heroine is impossible.

Return Home

> Performing within the bounds of one's subject position provides for certain levels of social rewards, at the very least the lack of censure or disciplining, while the violation of the bounds of decorum which surround one's position can lead to various forms of social punishment. Perhaps the greatest danger in violating one's position is the possibility of exclusion and, therefore, a kind of social death.
>
> Kendall R. Phillips (316)

The endings of the heroines in the three novels all have a strong connection with the extent to which the heroines transgress the bounds of decorum. If the heroine does not violate the gender boundary too much, it will be easier for her to return to the social position she occupied before the war and she tends to have a happy life according to patriarchal standards. If the heroine is too ambitious or too unusual, which means she violates the acceptable limits to a greater extent, she will, as Phillips says, experience "various forms of social punishment" (316). Disguising herself as a man and joining the army is itself behaviour which challenges and violates social norms, but it is acceptable in the traditional

society as long as the heroine does it for her father's sake. Apart from cross-dressing behaviour, if the heroine behaves according to propriety (li) and never thinks to transgress the limits, she is able to return home and be reincorporated into patriarchal society without any problem. Otherwise, the transgressing behaviour will possibly lead to her permanent exclusion from the society.

The story about Mulan in Chu's novel ends with her committing suicide. With masculine features and attributes, Chu's Mulan is fond of male tasks and detests female chores. Different from other girls, who worry about their charm and physical desirability, Mulan is a tomboy with an anti-feminist spirit. She abhors the female position assigned to her by society, and longs for a different subject position, the male role, which she is not allowed to have. Her aspiration is too high to be accepted in Zhang's retelling so that her illegitimate sacrifice of womanhood is not rewarded at the end; it even brings danger to her life as her extraordinary behaviour arouses the King of Tu-Jue's interest in her. Refusing to be his concubine, Mulan commits suicide in front of her father's tomb. Although in the novel the clear reason why Mulan chooses to end her life is not provided, the implication is clear. She refuses the traditional role the society regulates her to perform. She has gone too far to return to the patriarchy. She is sentenced to death by the traditional society, and she herself is the executioner.

The anonymous retelling also closes the story with the heroine's committing suicide. After completing many exploits and achievements at the front line, Mulan declines the imperial presents and position bestowed upon her and goes back home devoting herself to Buddhism. She confines herself to the house and buries herself in Buddhism with A Zhen, the female friend she brings back from the front line. Coming back from an open space, the battlefield, Mulan is happy to stay in a private space, her home. Compared to the heroic life she has had on the battlefield, in which she had a great contribution to the state, her low-profile life is isolated from the outer world, in which she has no social function, living like she is sentenced to a social death. Though her astonishing feat in the war has put men to shame, she never thinks to transgress the boundary of gender or to aspire to greater fame and fortune after the war. She is willing to confine herself in her own private space. A socially-isolated woman like Mulan, though she once violated the social norms, now seems to pose no danger to the stability of patriarchy. Patriarchal society has restored its order. Why does Mulan still have to commit suicide?

As the novel constructs Mulan as an immortal being with moral virtues that Confucian teaching exhorts all people to strive for, Mulan's real death is once again to

perform extreme loyalty to the emperor, Tai-Zong of the Tang Dynasty. According to history, the Emperor Tai-Zong is regarded as one of the greatest emperors in imperial China. During his reign, China gained stability and enjoyed prosperity. However, late in his reign he tended to believe treacherous officials and shunned those who were loyal to the state. In the novel, Mulan is framed by some treacherous officials and is aware that the Emperor of Tai-Zong is afraid of her power and wants to trap her by commanding her to serve in the palace. After telling the messenger that she refuses to go to the palace because she does not want to display the Emperor's faults, she cuts open her chest and pulls out her heart to prove her loyalty to the emperor. As a Confucian moral model, Mulan has to demonstrate an extreme version of loyalty to the emperor even at the last minute of her life.

Zhang's Mulan is the only survival heroine in the three novels produced before the 20th-century China. Following Xu's opera, Zhang's Mulan has a happy ending. At the completion of her cross-dressing journey, she not only brings fame and fortune to the whole family, but also brings another wife, Wanhua, to her fiancée. What's more, after the wedding Wanhua suggests to their husband that he should take their two maids as his concubines. Mulan is more than happy to accept this suggestion because these two maids once helped her to flee from Black Mountain when she was trapped there. At the end, the whole family live happily and peacefully forever. She is a traditional wife. The happy ending is the reward because she does not act against social norms.

Conclusion

It is not surprising that the possibility of subverting gender codes embedded in the pre-text of the Mulan story is given little scope in the retellings produced before the 20th century, when China practiced a feudal system and Confucianism was the state orthodoxy governing common people's life and behaviour. All of the Mulan retellings in this period to different degrees disclose the deeply rooted Confucian ideology and its dominant assumptions about women. Mulan is constructed to demonstrate Confucian moral virtues. Although in different time periods particular moral virtue, say chastity, might usurp the importance of other moral virtues in the retellings, Mulan represents a moral icon that all Chinese women should follow. When the retelling emphasizes the cross-dressing heroine's sacrifice and moral virtues she achieves, it is almost impossible for her to develop subjective agency and further to act beyond social regulations. Although Xu's opera retelling takes a step further and throws some light on gender fluidity through his

masculine-spirited heroine, the three novels from the Qing Dynasty do not carry forward the possibility. The heroine in the retellings produced before the 20th century has no way to escape the Confucian metanarrative that permeates the Mulan story.

Chapter Two

Gender and Nation: Multiple-faceted Mulan

Introduction

Comparing different retellings of the same story, as remarked in the previous chapter, can help discern shifts in social values because retellings are often imbued with the contemporary thinking and dominant ideology of the time the retellings are produced; this is very true for the Mulan retellings in the twentieth century. By the turn of the twentieth century, the images of the cross-dressing heroine had become multiple-faceted. She is not merely an exemplum of moral behaviour; she becomes patriotic, communist, or feminist at a particular time in the last one hundred years. Overall, the multiple images of Mulan after 1900 are constructed strongly in relation to historical events and contemporary thinking; hence, it is necessary to look at the chaotic history of China at the turn of the 20th century before embarking on the analysis of the multiple images of Mulan in this period of time.

Since the late 19th century, China has experienced a series of imperial intrusions and civil wars. The successive years of war lasted more than 50 years, which brought serious consequences to economy and politics in China and also made life very difficult for common people. The outbreak of the Taiping rebellion in 1850 marked the beginning of disaster, since the Qing Dynasty was not only unable to return to its former prosperity but was also incapable of preventing the decline of the state. Following the internal rebellions, foreign invaders coming from western and far eastern countries one after the other established a presence in China and carved up its territory at will. By the beginning of the 20th century, China had surrendered its sovereign rights under humiliating terms and was fast descending into a state which faced a national peril at any time. Due to the increasing anger at the impotence of the Qing government, revolutionaries launched the Xinhai Revolution in 1911, which quickly became a nationwide movement and finally led to the demise of the Qing dynasty and the establishment of the Republic of China. The collapse of the Qing dynasty marked the end to the 2000-year existence of imperial China; however, the end of the Qing dynasty did not mean that political power had come to the hands of people. Instead, the whole country continued suffering from warfare due to struggles among warlords, who cared only about their personal benefits and power rather than the interest of common people.

In the meantime, political and economic chaos also led to widespread criticism of traditional culture, particularly Confucianism. Intellectuals criticized the practice of

Confucianism, arguing that it prevented China from being modernized and making progress. The anti-traditional movement reached its peak when the May Fourth Movement took place in 1919. The May Fourth movement, though beginning with political purpose, ended up with a great influence on cultural aspects, such as literature, science, democracy and nationalism. The politically-focused May Fourth Movement was the climax of the more culturally-focused New Culture Movement, which lasted between 1915 and 1923. The famous Chinese intellectual Chen Duxiu inaugurated the publication of *New Youth* journal in 1915. Chen criticized traditional Chinese culture and promoted science and democracy from western culture; he also introduced Marxism to war-trodden China. After the May Fourth movement Marxism was widely spread in China, fuelling up China to become a communist country three decades later. Another famous Chinese scholar Hu Shi launched the language reform campaign, in which he advocated the use of vernacular Chinese, a new Chinese format. The use of friendly vernacular Chinese considerably boosted the creation of literary works in China. Besides social and literary aspects, the criticism of traditional culture, particularly Confucianism, in the movements also led to the acceleration of modernization and westernization in China. The concepts of democracy, individual freedom, and equality between the sexes, as well as national patriotism started striking in the heart of Chinese people, who wished to see changes in the state.

Although the Chinese people longed for a peaceful life, the real situation ran counter to their desire. Unfortunately, China continuously suffered from a turbulent situation. The warlords, instead of uniting their power to fight back the foreign intruders, were still more interested in fighting against their domestic rivals in order to strengthen their armed forces. On top of the domestic turbulence, Japan launched a full-scale invasion in China in 1937, marking the beginning of WWII in Asia. Chinese people again suffered from the war for the next eight more years until Japan surrendered to Allies in 1945. However, peaceful life did not come to the hands of ordinary people. The Chinese civil war, a war between the Western-supported Nationalist party (Kuomintang) and Soviet-supported Communist party, continued for another five years until Communist party founded the People's Republic of China and the Nationalist party retreated to Taiwan in 1949. Literally speaking, China experienced political instability for a hundred years after 1850. The successive wars ravaged politics and economy in China and at the same time accelerated the transformation of China from a traditionally feudal society to a modernized country.[8]

[8] For the modern history of China, see Chen, Fong-Xiang, and Li-Yue Lin. *The Modern History of China*.

The turbulent situation in China to a great extent helps construct a new image of the cross-dressing heroine, Mulan, who gradually transforms from a filial daughter to a national patriot in early 20th century retellings. Becoming aware of the peril in China, the authors of the Mulan retellings without exception bestow the huge responsibility of defending national borders on the cross-dressing heroine. She is now a national heroine who is obliged to arouse the Chinese people's patriotism and to encourage people to fight against foreign intruders. Also, due to the impact of the May Fourth movement, in which equality between the sexes and the emancipation of women were encouraged, the 20th century Mulan is often portrayed as more self-determined and more agentic than her predecessors produced in feudal China. Gender performance attributed to the heroine before the pre-modern period is basically in conformity with the role in which she is positioned in Confucian society. The extent to which the modern Mulan still complied with Confucian regulations of gender after Confucianism was severely attacked by Chinese intellectuals and her construction as a national icon in relation to gender performance in the modern retellings came under the influence of Western thinking of democracy and gender equality.

In this chapter, the discussion encompasses retellings collected from China and the Sinophone region in the twentieth century, including six spoken drama retellings,[9] eight novel retellings, and four film retellings (See Appendix Two). Five of the eight novels are written for young adult readers. The analysis will be divided into two parts based on different periods of time: 1900-1976, and 1977 to the present. The year 1976 marked the end of China's Cultural Revolution. During the ten-year revolution from 1966 to 1976, economic and education systems were brought to a halt, as was literary production. The image of Mulan before 1976 is more patriotic-oriented, whereas her image after 1976 is increasingly pluralistic, particularly near the turn of the 21st century when China rapidly grows as one of the strongest powers in the world. Pivoting on the representation of gender, I will explore how the image of Mulan, in connection with the ongoing historical events, changes from a filial daughter to a multiple-faceted heroine: a national heroine, an embodiment of communist worker, or an epitome of modern woman. I will also investigate intertextuality between genres and that between texts written for adults and children in order to see if the Mulan retellings in the twentieth century are able to reshape the existing metanarrative to overturn male supremacy and male domination.

[中國近代史] Taipei: Wunan, 2002.

[9] For the explanation of spoken drama, please see page 47-48.

I. From 1900 to 1976: The Rise of Patriotism and Sexual Equality

During the unstable history of China in the early twentieth century, the image of Chinese women underwent a rapid change. The attack on Confucianism plays an important role in the transformations of women's image in the 1920s. The movement of May Fourth urges society to overturn Confucian regulations and encourages women to look for individual emancipation and freedom in marriage. The transformations of women's image are manifested through the stories produced after the May Fourth, in which women's struggle and resistance against a male-dominant society are highly celebrated. And later when the conflict between China and Japan becomes intensified and there is a need of nationalism and patriotism in the 1930s, as Hung Changtai notices, the image of women in literary productions, particularly in spoken drama, changes again (155). The resistant female figures in the literary productions now fight against not only the inequality between sexes in patriarchal society but also the invaders coming from other countries.

If the transformation of women's image in the 1920s manifests Chinese intellectuals' dissatisfaction with old traditions, the change of women's image in the 1930s must reflect their anxiety about the situation in China because there are more and more authors devoting themselves to writing patriotic stories with the intention to arouse the national consciousness and patriotism of Chinese people. Among the many literary figures who are able to summon common people to defend the country, the most powerful is perhaps the woman warrior. As Hung observes, more than 600 Chinese plays dealing with woman warriors were published during the wartime (169). The mass production of woman warrior stories manifests the anti-traditional and patriotic spirit in 1930s China. To quote Hung again,

> By putting the awesome responsibility of defending the nation on women's shoulders, and in many instances by portraying males as less brave and less politically astute, wartime playwrights continued the assault on traditional Confucian values set in motion during the May Fourth era. To cast women of humble social status in the role of heroine, as in the case of patriotic courtesans, was in itself an act of defiance against tradition (170).

By casting a woman from humble social status as a nation-saving heroine, the stories not only inherit the anti-patriarchal spirit from the May Fourth Movement and continue to mock Confucian regulations on gender, but also display a spirit of patriotism in order to

galvanize Chinese people into action to defend their nation. The transformation of women's image from a resistant female in the 1920s to a woman warrior in the 1930s is in accordance with the need of the situation then pertaining in China.

Among the most famous woman warrior figures in literary productions, Mulan surpasses others in that she embodies an ethic which encourages the virtue of sacrifice for others. If Mulan before 1900 is to serve Confucianism and patriarchy, Mulan after 1900 has a new mission for which she has to rouse Chinese people to defend the country and to rebel against old patriarchal traditions. For the period between 1900 and 1976, six spoken dramas, three film adaptations, and three young adult novels will be examined; the discussion will be further divided into two parts based on different groups of readers and audience: spoken dramas and film adaptations for adult readers, and three novels for young adult readers.

Spoken Dramas and Film Adaptations for Adult Readers from 1900 to 1976

In the archive of the National Library of China, there are more than twenty plays about Mulan published between the late 1930s and the early 1960s. They are entitled *Hua Mulan*, *Mulan Joins the Army* (木蘭從軍), or *New Hua Mulan*. Some playwrights, like Ma Shaobo, even published the Mulan story several times in different years though with very slight differences in each version. Some playwrights, such as the grand master of spoken drama Ouyang Yuqian, are also involved in writing film scripts for the Mulan story; hence, the play and the film retellings in the wartime are themselves highly intertextual although film and drama share little consensus in their orientations in early twentieth century China. The film productions, combining commercial and artistic features, are highly entertainment-oriented whereas drama is regarded as a didactic art in China. For Chinese intellectuals, to quote Hung again, "drama was seldom a place for artistic creation and more a means of changing society. They looked upon theatre as a powerful political and social tool, designed to change social morals and reshape human views" (169). Due to its pedagogic function, drama becomes the most effective and efficient tool to broadcast nationalist and patriotic ideas to urban cities and remote villages all over China in the war period. There are numerous Mulan stories reproduced in the narrative of spoken drama during this time, but most of the retellings differ only slightly from one another. The six retellings I include here to some extent represent the heroine's gender performance in different ways, which reveals the rapid change in the image of women at this time.

According to Ouyang, in 1907 spoken drama was first introduced into China by Chinese students who once studied in Japan. Spoken drama is a new form of drama combining European and Chinese styles: it employs a stage setting and a curtain as European drama does, whereas the performance of artists and the weave of story still follow traditional Chinese opera. The term "spoken drama" (話劇) was first used in 1927, and its performance was for the service of political propaganda or for targeting social issues such as marriage-purchasing, the practice of usury, and racial discrimination (25-27). Ouyang claims that the effort of the Chinese Communist party has led to the popularity of spoken drama in China. With the party's guidance, "the movement of spoken drama is vigorously expanding in a new form, achieving continual victories in the battles of anti-monarchy, anti-feudal system and anti-reactionary revolution" (28).[10] Spoken drama is designed for common people to oppose monarchy and to fight for freedom and democracy; hence, it is intensely political. Unlike traditional opera, whose audience is confined to aristocrats and rich people, spoken drama reflecting the lives of common people touches the heart of the populace and soon receives strong popular support in China. If traditional Chinese opera is an efficient means for the ruling class to teach people, mostly educated people, the modern style spoken drama functions as an even more powerful tool for the intellectuals and the ruling party to broadcast ideas to the populace. Because of these features of the genre, spoken drama versions of the heroine's story are all highly political. The six versions chosen here are published between 1941 and 1957, a time when China undergoes several wars, in particular WWII, the civil war, and the Korean War in which China supports North Korea.

The three film adaptations encompassed here are screened in 1939, 1956, and 1964 respectively. Apart from the different generic features, the historical moments in which the film retellings are produced are not really the same as that of the six spoken drama retellings. The first film adaptation, *Mulan Joins the Army* (木蘭從軍), directed by Bu Wancang and with a script written by the famous dramatist Ouyang Yuqian, was first shown in Shanghai in 1939. As stated by Yu Li, the highly entertainment-oriented film industry does not produce patriotic movies until 1932. The January 28 Incident, a short war between China and Japan in Shanghai, caused a huge loss to the Chinese film industry and also led to a big shift in the focus of film productions in China. Almost all of the film

[10] The original Chinese content is as follows: 話劇運動便更能以新的姿態蓬勃地得到展開，在反帝反封建和打擊反動派的革命鬥爭中，一直取得巨大的勝利。

producers stopped making entertainment films such as ghost movies or historical movies; they instead started to produce realistic movies which reflect real situations and social injustice in China (49). The first film adaptation is produced under such circumstances. It is produced in the war time with implicit patriotic spirit; however, its representation of the Mulan story still complies with the generic features of film production. *Mulan Joins the Army* was favorably received by the critics and the public at that time because of its comedic and joyful atmosphere. This movie was also screened in the enemy country, Japan, and it impressed a young member of the Japanese audience[11] so much that he decided to write the Mulan story in Japanese 50 years later.

The second film is a recording of the Yuju opera performed by the famous Chinese opera artist Chang Xiangyu in 1956.[12] Yuju opera, known for its beautiful and lively melody, is one of the most popular local operas in China. This film recording, written by the playwright Chen Xianzhang, Chang's husband, should be basically classified as an opera version. Because it is being produced in the visual form of narrative, in which the artist's gender performance is visualized, I therefore classify it within the category of film adaptation. The last film adaptation, *Lady General Hua Mulan*, is the Huangmei Opera movie produced by the Shaw Brothers Studio in Hong Kong in 1964. Huang Mei opera is a rural folksong and dance company originating from the Chinese province of Anhui, whereas Huangmei Opera movie, produced mainly in Hong Kong in 1960s, is a hybrid of the features of film and Huangmei opera.[13] The Shaw Brothers produced numerous successful Huangmei Opera movies, which were favorably received by the public in Hong Kong and Taiwan in the 1960s and 1970s. According to Wu Hau, Huangmei opera movie tends to adopt folktales as its themes and avoids reflecting political situations at the time. Its richness in folk interest and rural flavor, together with its sad melodies, brought mingled feelings of grief and joy to people in those days (Wu, preface). The prominent actress, Ling Po, plays the role of the cross-dressing Mulan in *Lady General Hua Mulan*, for which she was awarded the best actress in the 11th Asian Film Festival. *Lady General*

[11] Tanaka Yoshiki, the famous Japanese science fiction writer, adapted the Mulan story in 1990. In the afterword to his novel, he mentions that his father had seen *Mulan Joins the Army* during the wartime and was very much impressed by the performance and beauty of the actress Chen Yunshang. As a fan of Chinese history, Tanaka has written and translated several Chinese historical novels.

[12] Chang performed "Hua Mulan" for the purpose of donating a fighter plane in order to support Chinese soldiers in the Korean War. Over a two year period she performed more than 180 shows all over China and successfully collected enough money to fulfill her promise. From China Daily, "Chang Xiangyu Lives on Hua Mulan's Story." http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-06/04/content_336376.htm acess 15, Nov. 2008.

[13] For the origin of Huangmei Opera, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huangmei_opera

Hua Mulan was also the first retelling produced for adult audience from the Sinophone region in my collection.

The Mulan retellings produced for adult readers/audiences between 1900 and 1976 not only disclose the dominant ideology and assumptions of the time but also, to some extent, reflect the turbulent historical background; however, due to the different generic conventions and orientations, the film retellings have a tendency to present the heroine, as well as her story, in a more light-hearted way than the spoken drama retellings do. The following discussion will focus on how the spoken drama and film retellings manifest contemporary ideas including patriotism, sexual equality and communism in relation to the heroine's gender performance.

The emphasis on patriotism is the most common feature shared amongst the versions of the Mulan story during this period. The heroine's role in galvanizing people into fighting against the intruders is a new motif in the Mulan story. Apart from her promotion of patriotism, mainly exhibited in her motivation for leaving home, the emphasis on patriotism is also shown in the change of the father's image. The father figures before 1900 are generally portrayed as either silent characters who never show their opinions about joining the war or cowards who are terrified at the prospect of joining the army, whereas the father figures in this period are far more patriotic and closer to the traditional image of the Chinese father, namely more patriarchal and authoritative. The heroine's father in Zhou Yibai's spoken drama is the typically patriotic father in this period; however, he is also the most patriarchal and sternest father. In Zhou Yibai's retelling, Mulan's ageing father is recruited for the army because of a mistake but still insists that a soldier should defend his country no matter how old he is (8). His insistence on joining the war constructs him as a patriotic soldier and a stubborn father. He is the one who strictly follows orders and rules; his opinion about gender is in compliance with traditional views in patriarchal society: women are inferior to men. His discrimination against women is made clear through his conversations with the female figures in his family at the outset of the retelling. When Mulan's mother tries to stop him from joining the war, he scorns her as an ignorant woman (10). When Mulan suggests taking his place in the army, he dismisses her plan claiming that a cross-dressing soldier is like a "monster" (怪物) (17). Furthermore, when one of his friends visits him for advice on how to avoid the recruitment, he tells him to become a woman because the army will not permit a woman to enter the battlefield (25). Having a patriotic and patriarchal father entails increased difficulty for Mulan in obtaining

permission to leave home as a cross-dressing soldier. A relatively patriarchal father figure also signifies a higher authority and a greater barrier against crossing gender boundary. Therefore, Mulan has to prove that she is a superior to her father as a soldier and that she can contribute more to her country than her father. As many Mulan heroines in this period do, Zhou Yibai's Mulan defeats her father in martial arts before obtaining his permission. Defeating an authoritative figure in Confucian society implies a challenge to patriarchal values and the possibility of female subversion. Mulan's triumph over a patriarchal figure, who strongly discriminates against women, bears a deeper meaning. She proves that woman could be superior to man even in traditional male defined skills such as martial arts. Her triumph not only makes a mockery of patriarchy but also asserts the ability of women and further brings the issue of sexual equality into the foreground. In some other retellings, Mulan disguises herself as a man in order to demonstrate the feasibility of her plan while in some retellings she even has to threaten to commit suicide if she is not allowed to take her father's place. The increase of difficulty for her plan to be accepted is because of the emphasis on patriotism in these retellings; however, with the consideration of patriotism, the retellings in this period construct a heroine not only more patriotic but also more self-determined and agentic.

In accordance with the patriarchal father, the initial image of Mulan in most of the spoken drama retellings is also traditional. Following the pre-text, five of the six spoken dramas bring the heroine on stage weaving diligently at the loom. The only exception, Wu Jialai's version, begins with the heroine and her sister on their way back home after picking berries. Though berry-picking is an outdoor activity, it is also part of female chores in ancient times. Following the original ballad, the modern spoken drama retellings also construct Mulan's femininity through daily female chores; however, there is a tendency to emphasize traditional female regulations in spoken drama retellings, particularly in Wu Jialai's version. In Wu's retelling, Mulan's mother gives a clear guide line to proper feminine behaviour at the outset: when talking, she does not expose her teeth; when walking, she moves with tiny steps; she is always tender and elegant in practicing social regulations (3).[14] The emphasis on traditional femininity, practiced by an older generation, in the beginning can form a contrast to modern femininity practiced by Mulan later in these modern spoken drama retellings, and it can, more importantly, fulfill its political mission.

[14] The original Chinese content is as follows: 女兒家必須是言不露齒，行不露趾，溫柔典雅，循規蹈矩。

When a traditional female, the socially-defined frailty, is willing to leave home to defend her country, men have no choice but to join the army. By comparison, the film adaptations are less consistent in their initial representations of the heroine.

In the film adaptations, the heroine's reiteration of daily female chores is not the only way to construct her gender representation. Due to the generic conventions, the heroine is able to perform an embodied femininity through the ways she moves and acts. In Chang Xiangyu's opera recording, how the heroine moves her hands, fingers, body and feet, together with her facial expression, all represent her as a diligent and tender girl. However, the other two film productions, instead of constructing her gender through female chores or an embodied femininity, introduce the heroine engaged in an outdoor activity, going hunting. Both films open with a scene in which Mulan aims at a group of flying birds in the sky and then shoots an arrow followed by a bird falling down to the ground. Although portraying Mulan as a girl with archery skills is not a new invention at all, when the audience is familiar with a weaving Mulan, a hunting Mulan can give a refreshing impression and hence escalates the entertainment effect of the film productions. Moreover, the hunting Mulan conforms to the image of modern women and can be more appealing to modern audience.

Although the two films represent Mulan as a hunting heroine at the outset, the portrayals of the heroine are different. While Bu Wancang's version gives a witty and lively heroine, the Shaw Brothers' version constructs Mulan as a heroine with masculine attributes. With the newly added episodes, such as how Mulan defeats four evil males and how she deals with the corrupted imperial messenger, Bu's film adaptation presents Mulan as wise and resourceful and that she is capable of solving problems through her own abilities. Compared to Bu's film adaptation, the atmosphere in the Shaw Brothers' film is relatively sorrowful due to the sad melodies of Huangmei and the less optimistic style of Huangmei Opera. However, the image of Mulan is also novel as she is probably the first Mulan to manifest the possibility of gender fluidity from her initial introduction. When the film begins, she is dressed in female hunting clothes but she does not perform an embodied femininity; instead, she is performing masculinity. In the Shaw movie, Mulan learns the news about the border intrusion and the imperial recruitment while she is hunting. Her worried face and hurried footsteps reflect her unsettled mind. In the film when she goes back home, she walks like a man. Carrying some game in one hand and holding her sword in the other hand, she walks with toes pointing out in a macho way, which is by no means the physical presentation expected of a woman in ancient times. Her gender performance is

confined neither by biological sex nor by the clothes she wears. A heroine with female outlook and masculine spirit demonstrates individual freedom for the heroine and the potential of floating attributes to gender identity.

Although the Mulan retellings in different genres constitute the initial image of Mulan in various ways, there seems to be a common similarity among most of the retellings in this period; that is, gender behaviour is learned and performing different genders can be achieved through practice. In Bu Wancang's film, after her father points out her voice can fuel suspicions of her gender identity, Mulan practices to lower the pitch of her voice in order to sound like a man. In some versions (Lin; Chen; Chang), Mulan learns how to bow to a general or how to walk like a man from her father, the symbol of patriarchy. Under the supervision of a patriarchal figure, Mulan gradually makes progress and reiterates masculinity without any difficulty. Her successful reiteration of masculine behaviours indicates that there is no fixed relation between gender and biological sex, an adequate example to demonstrate Butler's performativity theory. Gender is not innate; it can be attained through practice or reiteration. Although a cross-dressing story like Mulan's, in which the heroine successfully conceals her gender identity for twelve years, does carry an implication that gender is acquired rather than innate, the way how the transformation of genders can be dealt with in different ways. In the pre-modern versions, the switch of the heroine's gender performance between femininity and masculinity is presented as it ought to be. Once she puts on male armour, she is able to perform masculinity as "naturally" as it should be. The switch between femininity and masculinity in the pre-modern Mulan stories is presented as so natural that performing different gender behaviours is not an issue for the cross-dressing heroine. It is not until the modern era that performing masculinity is considered to be a problem for the heroine in the Mulan stories. Highlighting how the heroine tackles the problem of gender switching can render the story more realistic and increase the entertaining effect; moreover, it at the same time exposes the process of gender construction.

Another noticeable similarity is that the retellings in this era, perhaps as a response to the May Fourth Movement and the world trend, have a strong propensity to stress women's capabilities and to promote the idea of sexual equality. The most common scene regarding sexual equality in these retellings begins with one male soldier complaining about the "inequality" between men and women. According to him, men have to sacrifice their lives on the battlefield while women enjoy their lives doing nothing at home. Mulan refutes his comment that women are useless and in an advantageous position. Take Ma

Shaobo's Mulan as an example. She states, "After men head for the war, women are busy cultivating crops and weaving at home. They are busy the whole day in order to make sure every family lives in abundance and the soldiers, together with their horses, on the battlefield have plentiful supplies. The armour we soldiers wear and the food we eat are the products of women's diligence" (Ma, 1952; 22).[15] In the opera recording, Mulan further elaborates on women's capabilities. Besides being the suppliers of food and clothes, women can also fight in the war. Mulan, performed by the famous opera artist Chang Xiangyu, gives examples of heroines in the history and sings out loud, "who says women are inferior to men," (這女子們哪一點兒不如兒男) which has from then on become the most popular slogan about sexual equality in China. Chang Xiangyu's performance is so outstanding that she came to be regarded as the proxy of the great heroine Hua Mulan by critics and fans. Her heroic bearing is deeply inscribed on the hearts of those who have watched her performance. No shorter than her male comrades, Chang looks as strong as males in the opera recording. She does not look inferior to any male soldiers when she stands with them. Moreover, the masculinity she performed is even manlier than her male comrades. As the reporter of *China Daily* entitled the news of her death in 2004, "Chang Xiangyu lives on in Hua Mulan's Story."[16] Playing the role of Mulan is the greatest performance of her career, and it can be very difficult for the opera performers in the next generations to surpass her bench-mark achievement.

There is also a new invention in presenting the heroine's "extreme" masculinity in some spoken drama retellings (Ma, Guo, Chen, and Chang's recording). In their retellings, Mulan is shot three times n one of her arms during battle but she still keeps fighting regardless of the pain and the bleeding wound. Her heroic behaviour manifests both the patriotic spirit appropriate to a soldier and an extreme masculinity which even surpasses the masculinity a normal man is supposed to have. Due to an historical need to protect the country, the spoken drama retellings tend to portray Mulan with a high level of masculinity through the manifestation of her extreme bravery. However, the film adaptations by comparison incline to construct a less masculine heroine because of, again, generic conventions and different historical backgrounds.

The representations of the less masculine Mulan in the two film adaptations are

[15] The Chinese content is as follows: 想我等男子出征以後，女子在家耕種紡織、終日勤勞，使家家豐衣足食，軍前人壯馬肥。我等軍人身上所穿，腹內所用，都是他們辛勤所得。

[16] The same as footnote 4.

perhaps linked with the different historical and cultural moments in which they were produced. Bu's version is shown in 1939 during the war time whereas SB's version is launched in the market in 1964, almost two decades after the end of the war. Both films represent the heroine as more active and agentic at the beginning, and coincidentally they also construct a relatively feminine heroine during her cross-dressing journey. The emphasis on femininity during Mulan's army life can manifest the floating gender attributes of the heroine; however, SB's film adaptation does not carry a political mission to arouse national consciousness and patriotism as Bu's film does. The image of a relatively feminine heroine on the battlefield in both films is constructed partly through the innate features of the actress. In both movies, Mulan is obviously presented as less masculine than her opera counterparts when she serves as a soldier. Because of her petite figure, she looks especially small and hence feminine when she stands with her comrades. Even though she tries to replicate manly behaviour, the substantial difference in physical size still reveals her femininity. In SB's film, she is also shot in the arm. In contrast to Chang's Mulan, who remains calm and keeps fighting bravely, SB's Mulan is sent back to her army tent right after she is injured. With a pale face, pained expression and sweat dripping from her face, she obviously suffers from great pain. She is surrounded by a group of men like a little helpless girl. The masculinity she performs is apparently at a different level from that performed by Chang's Mulan. SB's Mulan does not need to encourage the Chinese to fight against the intruders so that her reaction to injury is closer to that of an ordinary human being. The motif of injury in SB's film allows the cross-dressing heroine to perform femininity, which implicitly suggests the violation of patriarchal laws on the male-defined battlefield.

Moreover, the motif of injury can certainly increase the entertainment effect of the film; it also symbolizes the danger of being exposed. The Mulan retellings in the twentieth century tend to present the danger through the motif of the heroine's injury in battle. During the process of treatment, Mulan's gender identity is in immediate danger of being exposed. The spoken drama retellings often leave out the treatment details and the injury becomes the best excuse for the heroine to go back home as it is suffered during the final battle of the war and there is thus no need for her to stay in the army. However, SB's movie dramatizes the treatment scene, which brings increasing tension and is highly suspenseful for the audience. After Mulan is brought back to the tent, the other soldiers intend to take off her clothes in order to treat the wound. Mulan strongly refuses to allow her clothes to be taken off, thus bewildering her comrades and making them think she is behaving

irrationally. Luckily, SB's Mulan goes to the war with her cousin, who suggests slitting the sleeve of her clothes, and the deadlock is therefore brought to an end. Revealing her female body in front of men is a social taboo which the cross-dressing heroine has to avoid violating. Bu's film adaptation also depicts a similar body-revealing scene, in which Mulan is asked to wash her feet with other male soldiers in public. Hence, clothes or shoes not only cover her body but also cover her secret; revealing part of the female body, such as the chest or feet, functions as a metaphor for disclosing gender identity. As revealing the female body in front of men strongly relates to female chastity and is an extreme infringement of Confucian regulations, Mulan has to find an alternative way to escape normal battlefield practice as SB's heroine does or sturdily refuse to conform as Bu's heroine does.

Compared to most of the retellings, in which the portrayal of the heroine's injury introducers the primary risk of disclosing her gender secret, Zhou Yibai's spoken drama constructs the danger of exposure in an unusual way: a traitor threatens to reveal Mulan's secret if she does not take his side. In Zhou Yibai's retelling, a traitor incites other soldiers to surrender in order to have a rich and safe life after the war. He successfully persuades other soldiers and almost brings a fatal disaster upon Mulan's camp, but is mysteriously killed by an arrow shot from nowhere right before he exposes Mulan's secret. Eric K.W. Yu has examined several Mulan retellings and found that the motif of disclosing Mulan's gender identity is often related to sexual desire and male power. As he aptly argues, the sexual desire of those males who have seen through Mulan's gender identity will often be stirred up and they will in consequence desire to possess Mulan. Mulan will then often react bashfully in front of them as if she has returned to the traditional female position of weakness or a sex object of males (60-61). In Zhou Yibai's retelling, Mulan "bashfully" (羞澀地) lowers her head when the traitor threatens to disclose her secret (87). Although he does not seem to ish to possess Mulan sexually, the hierarchical power relationship is clear. Even though he is a traitor, a dishonored soldier who strongly violates Confucian regulations on loyalty, the cross-dressing heroine, who is compelled to violate Confucian regulations on gender, by comparison stands in a disadvantageous position and has to behave in a bashful manner as a traditional woman in front of him, a male.

Some other retellings in this period such as Bu's film adaptation also include the traitor scene although they present it in different ways. However, the addition of the scene in the Mulan retellings to some extent reflects a critical situation China faces during the

war: the presence of traitors. In his research paper on Chinese collaborators during WWII, Dongyoun Hwang classifies Chinese collaborators into three different groups: the first group, the main group prosecuted after the war, describes themselves as patriots, claiming that they have risked their lives to save the nation; the second group alleges that they were forced to collaborate with the Japanese under coercion; and the last group collaborated with Japan for the sake of personal profit (76). The traitors in the Mulan retellings all belong to the third group, historically the smallest group of collaborators in the WWII analogy. If the Mulan retellings located their traitors in the first two groups, it might greatly complicate the story and will perhaps cause the retelling to digress from the main storyline. By adding a traitor who collaborates with the enemy entirely because of the pursuit of personal profit, the retellings not only reflect a critical situation which deeply troubles China during the war time but also form a striking contrast between the dishonored traitor and the patriotic Mulan.

Among the variations or modifications made to the Mulan retellings in this period, perhaps the most interesting plot is that Mulan "cross-dresses" as a girl in the middle of war in order to gather military information about their enemy. The use of women for information gathering and espionage purposes has a long history throughout the world. Although women involved in intelligence work come from a variety of classes at different ages, the most popular and enduring image of female spies is the mysterious Mata Hari in the West. As Knightley points out,

> Mata Hari has become the very epitome of the dedicated spy – the beautiful girl who, for money and thrill, wormed out of her lovers the most important secrets of state: 'The most fascinating, the most beautiful, the most astonishing and the most conscienceless woman spy ever', says a typical account. Her story seems to have all the elements traditionally associated with spying – deception, excitement, high living, power, money and, in the end, amazing bravery. (46)

After examining the cultural images of woman spies and the realities of women's intelligence work during World War I in the U.K. in her book *Female Intelligence: Women and Espionage in the First World War*, Tammy Proctor discovers that while the "romantic versions of seductive women spies abound in popular fiction and films" the reality is "many of the women who assumed dangerous jobs in the field worked as soldiers not seductresses" (5). In a typical spy story or a popular film, a female spy is often constructed

as sexy and beautiful without mentioning her ability in contrast with a professional and intelligent male spy, such as James Bond. By representing contrastive images of spies based on gendered perceptions, the audience/reader will be led to focus on the ability of a male spy and the sexiness or beauty of a female spy. In the scenes of information-gathering mission, Mulan is usually depicted as completing the mission alone. Although in some retellings she sneaks into the enemy's territory with her subordinate, who does not cross dress as a female but dresses as a male hunter, they are separated later and gather information in different sides of the enemy's camp respectively. She thus encounters two enemies and successfully tricks them into revealing the sought-for military information by using her wisdom and her beauty as well. When she meets them, she performs stereotypical "weak female" behaviour: she pretends that she has lost her way and is helpless (in Guo Xiaofeng's spoken drama retelling); she speaks with an affectedly sweet voice and almost flirts with the two enemy soldiers who are already dazzled by her beauty (in Bu's film adaptation). Her skills in espionage are matched by her martial skills. She is a woman of ability. Also, the invention of a female cross-dressed as a male soldier who then cross-dresses as a female in the middle of war has comic potential, as well as allowing the actress to demonstrate the full range of her performing skills.

Another commonly added plot, which has become a recurrent theme in the Mulan retellings produced in later periods, is that a Marshal in the army offers his daughter in marriage to Mulan before she returns home. The Marshal's proposal of marriage can certainly be interpreted as his affirmation of Mulan's capability. Among thousands of soldiers, he chooses a woman, a cross-dressing heroine, to be his future son-in-law. His mistake, although bringing an ironic and comic effect, does imply affirmation of woman's ability. Moreover, it can also signify a preference for a different kind of masculinity. Take Mulan in SB's film adaptation as an example. She is relatively petite and fragile in appearance compared with other tall-and-strong soldiers. The Marshal's proposition means he appreciates Mulan's capability and perceives her as a man of great integrity, namely the best man. The capability and wisdom Mulan exhibits on the battlefield surpasses the traditional masculinity performed by other male soldiers. In the eyes of the Marshal, Mulan is a qualified man with preferable masculinity. Hence, the Marshal's proposal of marriage not only signifies the affirmation of woman's capability from an authoritative figure in patriarchy but also denotes that there might be a tendency to prefer a different kind of masculinity in these modern Mulan retellings.

Under the influence of the May Fourth spirit and the rise of patriotism, there is more

than one ending in the Mulan retellings produced in this period. While most of the retellings end with the heroine's return home, Zhou Yibai's spoken drama retelling is the only exception in which the story ends with the heroine's participating in another war. How the story closes has a strong connotation with respect to the emancipation of the heroine; different endings can signify various degrees of agency and potential attributed to the heroine enabling her to escape the Confucian metanarrative of the story. Returning home implies returning to patriarchal society, where the heroine has to act according to social norms. However, it seems that not every home-returning Mulan is absolutely confined in the traditional role she is assigned to perform. In Chang's opera recording, which is based on Chen Xianzhang's spoken drama retelling, Mulan expresses willingness to go back to the battlefield when the border again comes under threat at the end of story. Though it is not clear if she is allowed to go back to the war, her action has won high praise from the Marshal, implicitly denoting the possibility for her to join another battle in the future. She seemingly possesses individual freedom to move between home, the female realm, and the battlefield, the male realm. However, she can possess the seemingly individual freedom only on the condition that she joins the war because of patriotic love towards the state, the dominant concept at the time the retellings are produced.

The decision for Zhou Yibai's Mulan to stay on the battlefield upon the close of the story is partly due to patriotism as well. As a variation to the ending of the Mulan story in *Sui Tang Yan Yi* (隋唐演義), Zhou Yibai's heroine is also asked by the Emperor to be his concubine. Mulan turns the demand down because it violates Confucian propriety. The Emperor is enraged at her refusal so he gives her two choices: either to be his concubine or to die. When she is about to be executed, the border happens to be invaded again so that a sympathetic high-ranking official recommends that Mulan should lead the army defending the border. Mulan is happy to protect the state as it is the responsibility for a soldier. Before she leaves the imperial palace, she is asked if she will resume female clothes. Mulan replies "there is no difference between men and women in terms of their capability. It does not matter if I put on female clothes or male clothes" (131).[17]

According to Eric K. W. Yu, the motif of taking Mulan as an imperial concubine renders Mulan as the spokesperson for Confucian propriety and therefore forces Mulan to make one more sacrifice for patriarchal society. As Yu explains, the Emperor's desire to take Mulan as his concubine can be regarded as the extreme version of male desire to

[17] The Chinese text is as follows: 男子和女子，能力上本來沒有什麼不同，回復也行，不回復也行。

subjugate the female. Taking her as an imperial concubine means domestication of the superior-to-man woman warrior, signifying "emasculating" Mulan in order to make her resume bashful female manners. The Emperor can satisfy his sexual fantasy by having Mulan as his concubine, but at the same time it might bring possible danger to the state because a beauty like Mulan has great potential to cause serious harm to a patriarchal state. The Emperor is therefore caught between satisfying his personal sexual fantasy and being ascetical in order to maintain the stability of the state. It is Mulan's duty to remind him of Confucian regulations that a subordinate cannot be the Emperor's concubine (46). Mulan would rather die in order to act properly than become the imperial concubine, the synonym of violating Confucian regulations. Therefore, she still behaves according to the restrictions of Confucianism. In Zhou Yibai's retelling, the second war happens in time to enable her to elude the death penalty. Joining another war seems to be the best solution for Mulan to escape the dilemma; it once again reinforces the duty/function of Mulan to manifest one's patriotic love for the state. She is also the spokesperson for patriotism. However, there is an apparent difference in her participation in the two wars.

While it was necessary for her to disguise herself as a man in the first war, there is no need to hide her gender identity in the second war. She is not a cross-dressing soldier anymore, but now a woman fighter. She is allowed to intrude upon the male realm without performing masculinity, and the hierarchical relationship between two genders in patriarchal society could be in consequence destabilized. As Li Siuleung puts it, "[w]omen who do not take up gender disguise yet are potentially more threatening as 'virtual cross-dressers' in their resplendent costumes of masculine armour" (6). However, to use Li's words again, "[t]he complexities of gender politics in representing resistance and containment must be situated in the contemporary social-cultural context in order to be effectively decoded" (6). Zhou Yibai's Mulan is merely another version of the heroine in Chang's opera recording. They are allowed to join the war as females only on condition that the state is in need of them. The freedom they possess is temporary and illusory; it is not real subjective agency which will enable them to be released from gender restrictions. Therefore, their stories cannot really bring about any social change to the status of women.

In comparison with the endings in spoken drama retellings, the endings in the movie adaptations are relatively conservative: Bu's version ends with Mulan's wedding; the SB version closes with a clear anticipation of the coming wedding of the heroine. According to Hung, the love between Mulan and Liu, her husband-to-be in Bu's film adaptation, is a new addition to the Mulan story (165); however, it is not the first time that

Mulan fights side by side with her future husband. Zhang's novel from the Qing Dynasty has Mulan's fiancée joining the war in its final years, but the difference is that Mulan and Liu are free to pursue love whereas in Zhang's novel Mulan and Wang are engaged through the arrangement of their parents. Through the romance plot, Bu's film reflects one of the May Fourth tenets: the freedom to pursue romantic love. However, the last scene in the film ironically transforms the heroine's story into a tale of domestication, which violates another May Fourth tenet: individual emancipation for women. In the movie, Liu walks into their bridal chamber, in which Mulan is sitting bashfully and patiently waiting for her husband. He grins mischievously and tells Mulan, "you cannot deny it; you cannot escape this time (看妳怎麼賴，妳逃不掉了)." Liu has suspected Mulan is female during the war, but Mulan strongly repudiates it each time. Literally, what Liu means is that Mulan cannot deny and escape the fact that she is female, but symbolically it also means Mulan cannot escape Confucian regulations in patriarchal society anymore. Her violation of gender norms is temporary, and she has to resume the traditional female role at the end. The film closes with a shot of Mulan smiling bashfully, further denoting her domestication to patriarchy.

Similar to Bu's movie, the ending of SB's *Lady General Hua Mulan* does not further elaborate the possibility of gender fluidity which has shown in the beginning of the film. In the last scene of the film, Mulan exchanges gifts with her husband-to-be before he leaves: she gives a richly embroidered purse and he a valuable sword. The exchange of male and female symbols indicates that she bestows her femininity upon him, in exchange for his masculinity. Through the exchange, they are affirming traditional gender roles as they make one another custodians of their sexuality. With an anxious look, Mulan sees off her future husband and tells him to come back soon. The ending not only reinforces the polarized gender roles but also strengthens the patriarchal ideology that woman should be confined at home waiting for her husband. Furthermore, the intertextuality between *Lady General Hua Mulan* and another SB movie *Eternal Love* (梁山伯與祝英台) to some extent also contributes to the conventional ending in the former film.

Eternal Love, launched by the SB film company in 1963, describes a sad love story between a poor scholar Liang Shanbo and a young lady Zhu Yingtai. Critics often regard this story as the Chinese version of "Romeo and Juliette." The film begins with Zu's successful persuading her father to allow her cross-dressing plan in order to go to school. On her way to school, she encounters the poor scholar Liang, with whom she studies

together for 3 years and gradually falls in love with him. One day, she receives a letter from her father urging her to go back home as soon as possible. Before she leaves she tries to convey through hints that she is female, but the bookworm Liang has no suspicion of her gender identity at all. Later when Liang finds out Zhu is a girl it is already too late because she is forced by her father to marry a rich suitor. Liang is heartbroken and dies not too long after he departs from Zhu the second time. On the day Zhu is married, a mysterious whirlwind occurs when Zhu and the wedding team pass Liang's grave. Zhu weeps in grief and begs the grave to open up; mysteriously, the grave opens as she wishes and Liang appears inside the grave. Without any hesitation, Zhu jumps into the grave and it closes up immediately. The film closes at a pair of butterflies flying freely in the sky, symbolizing the union of Liang and Zhu after their death. This film has been such a huge box office success that subsequent films, especially love stories, tend to make a link with it, as is the case with *Lady General Hua Mulan*.

There are several parallels/links in the romance plots between the two films. Like Zhu in *Eternal Love*, Mulan drops hints to General Li, her husband-to-be, that she is female. Unfortunately, Li is as slow-witted as the bookworm scholar Liang. When at the end General Li visits Mulan and discovers the reality, Mulan teases him that he is even stupider than the bookworm Liang because Liang and Zhu are classmates for only three years and Mulan and he are comrades for 12 years. In embarrassment General Li replies that the stupidest person must be the Marshal because he even proposes marriage to Mulan for his daughter. The filmic effect is highly comic here. Furthermore, when General Li is about to leave Mulan's home, she tells him clearly that her father will not be like Zhu's father, who separates the unfortunate lovers in *Eternal Love*. The parallels/links between the two films can certainly promote the entertainment effect and box office in *Lady General Hua*, and they can also compensate the audience for the deep regret they had for the poor couple when watching *Eternal Love*. The sad story between Liang and Zhu is originally designed to be a romance, which can be manifested from its Chinese title, meaning "Liang and Zhu," and its English title "Eternal Love" as well. *Lady General Hua Mulan*, representing a masculine heroine at the outset together with a title emphasizing the capability of the heroine, seems to represent a different story/choice for female. However, with the parallels/links or intertextuality to *Eternal Love* SB's Mulan adaptation has been transformed into a traditional romance for women at the end.

Perhaps the most obvious difference between the spoken drama retellings and the film retellings is that the former lays a heavy stress on one's performativity as a *citizen*,

which is best shown in the reasons for the heroine's return home. While the films construct Mulan more as a filial daughter, the spoken drama retellings seem to represent her more as a diligent citizen. When the thought of returning home comes to Mulan, for example in Chen Xianzhang's spoken drama version, instead of thinking about her parents she unconsciously rehearses the actions of spinning and weaving (37). The heroines in Wu Jialai's and Ma Shaobo's versions cannot even wait to begin weaving when they arrive home. Weaving seems to usurp her filial love for her ageing parents in these retellings. Also, in Lin Yan's version, written for the celebration of Woman's Day on the eighth March in 1947, there is an unusual contrast between Mulan and her elder sister, who is portrayed as lazy and therefore unattractive. The preference for the diligent woman and the importance of being diligent for the heroines are made clear in the spoken drama versions. Furthermore, Guo Xiaofeng's version even concludes that being diligent is a woman's responsibility for her country with Mulan singing "being diligent is the right behaviour (勤勞本是正當事)" and her sister echoing "a woman taking part in productive labor serves her country (婦女生產爲國家)" (44). In many Mulan retellings, the weaving scene at the outset represents how the heroine performs femininity, but it does not appear again at the end of the story. In the spoken drama retellings, the emphasis on weaving denotes that weaving is not merely the way through which Mulan performs femininity but also the way through which Mulan performs diligence as a responsible female citizen. Diligence is a virtue a woman should have in patriarchal society, and more importantly, it is an essential characteristic an ideal citizen should have in a communist society. In the spoken drama retellings, Mulan identifies herself as a diligent worker, and thus one of the main producers of wealth in a society based on Marxism, echoing the communist views on ideal citizens. Her eagerness to devote herself to labor reveals the communist ideology that one should always be in the service of one's country.

The spoken drama retellings are produced in the service of the country; those produced in the 1950s or hereafter are clearly shaped by communist ideology. Besides representing a heroine with communist spirit, the retellings also attempt to make more connections between Mulan and communism. As Li Siuleung observes, in Ma Shaobo's revision Mulan "is presented as a native of Yan'an – the holy land of the Chinese communist revolution" (85). In reality, the spoken drama retellings of the Mulan story produced after Ma's version in China all present Mulan as a native from Yan'an. When the authenticity of the Mulan story still remains a myth, connecting Mulan with Yan'an, the

cradle of Chinese communism, has a significant meaning. As the retellings always reflect the dominant ideology and assumption of the time they are produced, it is not surprising that Mulan has transformed from a moral icon, a symbol of patriotism, to an emblem of communism.

In general, the spoken drama retellings and the film adaptations of the Mulan story between 1900 and 1977 are in opposition to each other in terms of gender development/representation of the heroine. While the film adaptations tend to present a subversive and masculine girl at the outset but end the story with her domestication by Confucian regulations, the spoken drama retellings incline to portray a rather traditional heroine at the beginning but attribute the heroine with conditionally individual emancipation at the end. Due to different generic conventions, various target audiences, and divergent purposes, the images of Mulan are not represented in the same way. Although the heroine in the pedagogic-oriented spoken drama versions seem to possess a higher level of subjective agency than the heroine in the commercial-oriented film adaptations, her representation cannot potentially bring about positive social change as the individual emancipation is conditioned.

Novels for Young Adult Readers in the 1940s and the 1950s

During the first half of the 20th century in China, retellings of the legendary Mulan story in various narrative forms sprang up like mushrooms for political purposes. Authors during that time retold the Mulan story not only for adult readers but also for child readers. In feudal China, only children of noble birth or from upper class had the opportunity to receive education; most of the plebeian children were illiterate. The situation has changed after the practice of the feudal system came to an end in China. The popularization of vernacular Chinese has made reading accessible and much easier for common people. Also, due to self-reflection and the influence coming from the western countries, more and more people in China acknowledged the importance of education for children. Under these circumstances, intellectuals started making efforts to publish texts for child readers. I have found three young adult novels of the Mulan story published between the late 1940s and the late 1950s: Wu Shutian's novella published in Shanghai in 1948, Xiao Xiao's novel published in Taiwan in 1953, and Dong Qianli's novel published in Hong Kong in 1959. As John Stephens states in his *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*, texts produced for child readers usually have pedagogic meanings:

> Writing for children is usually purposeful, its intention being to foster in the child reader a positive apperception of some socio-cultural values which, it is assumed, are shared by author and audience. These values include contemporary morality and ethics, a sense of what is valuable in the culture's past (what a particular contemporary social formation regards as the culture's centrally important traditions), and aspirations about the present and future. (3)

The three young adult novels, without exception, all have pedagogic functions with the same intention to pass down cultural inheritance to next generations: Wu Shutian's novel is incorporated in the Collection of Chinese Celebrity's Stories. The editor of Xiao's version considers that publication of the Mulan story can serve the purpose of national propaganda (1953: 1), and the editor of Dong Qianli's novel praises Mulan for manifesting all the most respected virtues a traditionally ideal Chinese should have (1959: Preface).

Wu Shutian's novella is probably the first narrative about Mulan written for young adults in China. It contains 32 pages with seven small woodcut illustrations, which help to explain the story. This novella is published in 1948, near the end of Civil War in China. Basically following the storyline of the ballad version, Wu's novella gives a brief description of Mulan's army life and includes more details of her domestic life. Parallel to the verbal text, only one illustration depicts her life on the battlefield; however, it provides more information on top of the verbal narrative. When the text declares that "she is always brave and determined, never withdrawing from the battlefield (總是勇猛直前，絕不退縮)," the illustration manifests not only her outstanding courage but also her great martial skills and leadership (24). In the illustration, she is centrally placed and viewed from a distance, confronting the enemy coming from the left side (See Figure 1.0). Her comrades follow her, coming from the upper right hand side and positioned still further from the viewer, which expresses the leadership of Mulan. Also, Mulan holds a sword which she has apparently just pulled from the body of an enemy. The enemy is about to fall to the ground, and is obviously suffering great pain. The illustration helps to visualize the masculine image of Mulan, constructing her as a capable and great soldier.

Contrary to the sketchy descriptions about Mulan's masculinity, her femininity is represented in close detail, particularly through verbal narrative. The text suggests her femininity is embodied in the ways she laughs, behaves, and even sleeps. "Sweetly Mulan sleeps. On the bed her hair hangs down quietly like lake water. There is a pure smile on her

spotless face" (5-6).[18] Words like sweetly, quietly, pure, and spotless denote her youth and femininity, representing her as a young girl full of vigor. The text also describes her wearing "rose-like color on her face" (玫瑰色的紅暈) on her way home after she cross-dressed as a man for twelve years (25). The whole novella explicitly constructs Mulan as a female, emphasizing her bravery and achievement, with little potential to represent a heroine with gender fluidity. That is to say, gender depiction in Wu's novella still follows Confucian regulations, which renders the impossibility of escaping the Confucian metanarrative for the heroine.

However, echoing the retellings produced for adult readers, Wu's novella to some extent affirms the idea that gender is constructed rather than innate. The first time Mulan puts on the armour, she feels a sense of unfamiliarity and confinement. Compared to the light clothes she used to wear, in which she felt softness and freedom, the metal armour is heavy and hard. She feels she is confined between pieces of wooden board and is unable to walk. Clothes here symbolically function as social regulation although through which Mulan is enabled to perform a particular gender. She feels soft and comfortable in women's clothes because she has been reiterating the female role since she was born; to be exact, she is used to it. She feels uneasy in men's clothes because she is not used to wearing them, or to be more precise, she lacks practice. Although the armour is literally heavy, the uneasiness and confinement Mulan senses when arming herself has a symbolic meaning. She is not used to perform masculine behaviour so that she can greatly sense the confinement, or social regulations, coming with the new gender role. In Wu Shutian's retelling, Mulan overcomes the unfamiliarity and confinement through practice as she affirms that "everything can be developed by habit (什麼都是習慣養成的)" (10). Mulan's success in crossing gender boundary through practice denotes the priority of nurture over nature in developing one's gender.

As a novelisation of Bu's 1939 movie adaptation, Xiao Xiao's young adult novel has few differences from its pre-text apart from that it seems to carry a heavier propaganda mission. This novel was published in Taiwan in 1953, not long after the Jiang Kai-shek led Nationalist Party had withdrawn from mainland China to Taiwan. It was a time when the priority in Taiwan was to launch a counter-attack against the Chinese Communist party in

[18] The Chinese text is as follows: 木蘭睡得很甜蜜，頭髮披在床頭，安靜得像一湖春水，潔白的臉上，有著純潔的笑靨。

order to save Chinese people in mainland China;[19] therefore, it was also a time when the propaganda messages were shown everywhere including on the streets, in TV programs, movies, and retellings of historical figures, and Xiao's young adult novel was part of this campaign. Clear propaganda messages are printed on the back cover of the novel: "country is a top priority; nation is a top priority; work with collective wisdom and effort; save the country save the people."[20] Xiao's young adult novel is incorporated in the Collection of Standard Historical Stories, a collection of stories about famous Chinese people. As a result, it is also apparent that the publication of the collection intends to set up standard history and build the great image of the Chinese nation in Taiwan, a Sinophone region, particularly after Taiwan had been colonized by Japan for fifty years. Xiao's version in this sense can be intensively political because, on the one hand, it proposes to claim the orthodox cultural image of Chinese in Taiwan and, on the other hand, carries the mission to save Chinese from the hands of Chinese communists.

Like Wu Shutian's novella, Xiao's version also has ten small woodcut illustrations, which probably can denote the convention of novels written for young adult readers at that time. Different from Bu's film adaptation, in which Mulan is visually represented as a cross-dressing heroine with obvious feminine features, the illustrations in Xiao's retelling present her as a male soldier. Even though she looks no different from other male soldiers in the illustrations, she is often under suspicion concerning her gender identity in the text, like her predecessor, Mulan in Bu's film adaptation. The discrepancy between visual and verbal texts in Xiao's novel can thus provide readers with more space for imagining her gender performance, but at the same time ironically arouses a sense of unreality about the cross-dressing story.

Unlike Wu's novella, in which gender is described as learned from daily reiteration, Xiao's novel portrays femininity as the nature of the heroine. The verbal text persistently reminds readers of her femininity through the suspicion of her comrades, suggesting that gender is innate and that it is impossible to perform a different gender adequately. Also, Xiao's young adult novel implicitly suggests that femininity is the synonym of inferiority, particularly in the scene of information-gathering. Following the plot in Bu's film adaptation, Xiao's retelling also portrays that Mulan "cross-dresses" as a girl with her husband-to-be Liu Yuandu, who disguises himself as a hunter, in order to collect military

[19] It was once a common view in Taiwan that Chinese people suffered greatly due to exploitation by Chinese communists and that, therefore, they were in need of help and salvation from Taiwan.
[20] The Chinese text is as follows: 國家至上，民族至上。群策群力，救國救民。

intelligence. Similarly, the novel represents them as a couple, but the difference is that the text reinforces the differences between man and woman, or the inferiority of the "cross-dressing" Mulan to Liu in terms of physical strength. "Mulan is after all a girl and is not used to walking in the desert…her feet feel a little sore…" (68).[21] By comparison the text of the novel provides the reader with more detailed depictions of the heroine's gender performance and how she feels. However, this description of Mulan's inferiority in physical strength is paradoxical because Mulan has previously been depicted as a capable soldier with extensive experience in battle. Mysteriously, she is able to outperform Liu when she cross-dresses as a soldier but she is inferior to him when she resumes female clothes. The text describes that she is *after all* a girl, suggesting woman's inferiority to man. When she resumes a female role, even though she is said to "cross-dress" as a girl, she has to perform based on social norms, according to which a female is fragile and thus inferior. Gender construction of Mulan in Xiao's young adult novel is basically conventional: it affirms the idea that gender is innate through the image of the heroine which is represented according to Confucian doctrines.

The last young adult novel, written by Dong Xianli, is published at the end of the 1950s in Hong Kong. In the preface, the editor bestows high praise on Mulan for the virtues she displays in the story; hence, it is not difficult to imagine that, apart from the fact that it is written for child readers, Dong Qianli's retelling could be highly sermonic and that gender representation of the heroine could be in consequence traditional. However, this is not really the case. Gender representation in Dong's young adult novel is much more complex than that in the Mulan retellings for adult readers, and it also, surprisingly, carries the possibility of gender fluidity a further step. At the beginning of the novel, Mulan is represented as immature, headstrong, hot-tempered, competitive and brave. The tomboy Mulan, detesting female chores, once killed seven wolves when hunting on her own; she claims that she is the strongest child in her neighborhood. The initial image of Mulan in Dong's retelling is very different from any of her predecessors. While most of the heroines demonstrate "positive" virtues at an early stage of the stories, Dong's Mulan is the only exception as she is portrayed in terms which to some extent are negative such as immature, headstrong, and competitive. However, to give a relatively negative image of Mulan at the outset is to pave the way for her to undergo a transformation.

When the novel begins, Mulan is 14 years old, a rather young age compared to the

[21] The Chinese text is as follows: 木蘭到底是一個女孩子，走不慣沙漠的地方…兩隻腿已有少許痠了。

heroine in the other retellings. As an adolescent, Mulan is experiencing a drastic change in her body and her mind. Dong's portrayal of an immature heroine is actually more in accordance with the image of adolescents in real life. In Dong's retelling, the immature Mulan suddenly grows up after she decides to join the war in her father's place, and curiously her position in the family is also altered along with her decision. She has changed from an immature child to the savior of family. Her plan to take her father's place in the war makes her the real supporter of the family because she is now the only person who is able to keep the integrity of family. In company with her change, the attitude of her family towards her changes dramatically. Mulan's elder sister, who used to regard Mulan as a child, now perceives Mulan as her elder brother and is in need of Mulan's protection. Mulan's younger brother, who often had quarrels and was fond of competing with Mulan, now perceives Mulan with respect and admiration. In Dong's retelling, the whole family literally treats her as the *real* eldest son, rather than a "cross-dressing" son, as her mother announces "from today Mulan is the eldest brother in our family, and you do not need to do any housework anymore" (23).[22] Apparently, Mulan comes from a family who practices Confucian teaching faithfully. Once they decide to let her join the war, she becomes a real son in her family. Therefore, the female chores, through which Mulan constructs and performs femininity, have to be disposed of. Thenceforth, she has to perform according to her new identity, the oldest *male* child in her family.

Dong Qianli's retelling also gives more details about the moment Mulan takes off female clothes and puts on male armour, providing a chance to look into the depths of Mulan's mind. In contrast with the Mulan heroine produced in WWII retellings, who is eager to show her patriotic love toward the country and does not seem to bother about gender-swapping, Dong's Mulan experiences an identity struggle. "Even though Mulan was once eager to become a man, she cannot help feeling sad at the moment she takes off her female clothes and puts on the armour. This means the end of her golden age as a teenage girl. What will happen to her when she comes back from the war? Will she be a man? or a woman? or an ugly old soldier with cuts and bruises all over the body" (18)?[23] Although the heroine in Xu Wei's opera retelling seems to struggle a little bit before she unbinds the bandage of her feet, the inner struggle Dong's Mulan experiences is not merely

[22] The Chinese text is as follows: 木蘭從今起是長兄，不要你再幫著做家事。

[23] The Chinese text is as follows: 即使木蘭曾經那樣渴望變成一個男子，但當她脫卸女服，換上戎裝的一瞬間，也不禁感覺淒涼。這意味著她黃金般少女時代的終結。等到罷戰回來，自己會變的怎樣？是男？是女？或者是一個遍體創痕的醜怪老兵？

a worry about the loss of desirability in the marriage market. She is also lamenting her loss of femininity and the end of her youth; moreover, she is troubled about her gender identity when she returns home in the future. That is to say, she is not sure if she can retrieve femininity after the war. The uncertainty of retrieving femininity to some extent asserts that gender is attained through reiteration and that one could be unable to perform gender due to lack of practice.

Another modification which makes Dong's retelling prominent is that Dong gives a clear depiction about Mulan's sexual desire. While portraying Mulan's sexual desire almost becomes a taboo in moral-emphasized retellings, Dong's version constantly represents Mulan as a female through revelation of her sexual desire towards her comrades. When she sees the naked body of one of her comrades, she blushes and her heart beats faster (33). Outwardly she is able to perform as a man but inwardly she is a girl. Her femininity is constructed through what she sees, feels, imagines, and particularly through her relationships with Li Gu and Su Xiong, her two closest comrades. At night, she sleeps between Li and Su, trying to suppress her sexual impulses: "Frankly speaking, Mulan wishes to retrieve the female role at this moment…a lot of female desires are shouting at the bottom of her heart. The suppression has become a tribulation and a shackle for her with the passing of time" (48).[24] Revealing sexual desire of the heroine in such a vivid way in the Mulan retelling is unprecedented, especially when it is written for young adult readers. Although Mulan is not allowed to show her feminine desire outwardly in the male-defined battlefield, revealing her inner desire implicitly suggests that she joins the war as a female rather than as a cross-dressing soldier and that she is allowed to intrude male realm with feminine attributes. However, there is also a suggestion that female desire is dangerous and in need of regulation. Mulan is more powerful if she feels desire but is able to control it. By revealing Mulan's sexual desire, although in an indistinct way, Dong's novel paradoxically evokes and breaks the Confucian frame of the story at the same time.

Parallel to Victoria Flanagan's findings when she examines female cross-dressing narratives in children's literature, another interesting modification Dong makes in the retelling is that "the interrogation of normative gender categories which is initiated by the cross-dressing heroine is rarely confined to her alone, but extends to encompass an exploration of other constructions of masculinity and femininity" (100); for example, the

[24] The Chinese text is as follows: 說實話，到了這個時候，木蘭倒是希望回復女兒身…那種壓抑日久了變成磨難，變成對自己的桎梏。

gender construction of Mulan's husband. Contrary to expectations, Mulan does not marry either of her closest friends, symbol of traditional masculinity; instead, she marries a frail scholar, the representative of a different style of masculinity. In contrast to Mulan, who is able to manifest masculine attributes, Mulan's husband, Li Jiulang, is feminine but ambitious. In Dong's depictions, Mulan sometimes forgets she is a woman after several years of disguise although the text constantly reminds the reader of her femininity through revealing her female desire. After she confesses the truth to Li Gu, she does not fall in love with Li Gu, but mysteriously with Li Jiulang, a relatively feminine scholar. As the text describes, Li Jiulang's gentle and refined manners is like "tinder (火種)," which burns Mulan's constrained heart (106). Her decision to marry Li Jiulang, rather than Li Gu, more or less implies that a male with gender fluidity is preferable to a man with traditional masculinity. Dong's retelling basically gives high praise to people who can perform gender with fluidity although to some degree it curiously suggests traditional femininity is the right gender behaviour every woman should strive to perform.

After Mulan returns home, she is eager to show Li Jiulang her "real" face. She carefully puts on make-up and practices how to walk in a gliding and graceful way, but is frustrated that she is unable to walk like her elder sister, symbol of traditional femininity (120-121). Her sister encourages her to practice more and tells her "you will be like a woman (你也會變得像一個女人的)" (121). "You will be like a woman" means Mulan is not even like a woman now; her frustration shows her desire to perform a traditional role, a role she never strived to be before joining the war. Mulan's eagerness to retrieve a traditional female role in front of her husband-to-be has attenuated the subjective agency she has exhibited so far in the retelling; however, she is still the heroine who manifests the highest level of subjective agency in the Mulan retellings discussed so far because she is able to incorporate both elements of masculinity and femininity and which transforms her everyday world at the end of the novel.

In order to turn down the emperor's command to be his concubine, Mulan and her family decide to run away and join another military campaign, which later leads to the overthrow of the incumbent emperor. "Now she puts on male clothes again, feeling she is suddenly emancipated. Emotionally she is a pure woman but with masculine ambition. What makes her gratified is that she can have both this time and she is not dejected because of lack" (129).[25] Cross-dressing as a man but without hiding her gender identity

[25] The Chinese text is as follows: 現在，她又一次穿上男裝，有一種驟然解放的感覺。她的感情是一

makes her an integrated human being. Similar to the heroine in Zhou Yibai's opera version, she ends up joining another battle without disguising her gender identity; however, there is a difference between them. Zhou Yibai's heroine is somewhat forced to join another war; she places the safety of the nation as her priority and perceives gender performance as an unimportant issue. Dong's Mulan joins another battle out of her own will; she feels emancipated and enjoys the freedom she has this time as she can fulfill her masculine ambition without making the sacrifice of femininity. She has both. She can perform gender fluidity without following any Confucian regulations. To quote Flanagan again, she dresses as a man "in order to escape societies which seek to repress and limit femininity. Cross-dressing allows [her] to inhabit the world of men and experience many of the liberties denied [her] when [she is] dressed and perceived as feminine (100).

In general, gender representations in the three young adult novels produced between the 1940s and the 1950s are radically different. While Wu's novella asserts the concept that gender is constructed and can be attained through reiteration, Xiao's young adult version by contrary maintains the idea that gender is innate. Although the two retellings tackle gender issues from different points of view, the endings are similarly conservative as gender representations of the heroines do not destabilize normative gender categories. Dong's retelling brings a great surprise because it not only overturns the assumption that gender construction in texts written for young readers must be pedagogic and therefore stereotypical but also constructs a heroine who destabilizes the polarized conception of femininity and masculinity. Moreover, Dong's retelling, in comparison with the Mulan retellings for adult readers, gives more depictions on the inner struggle of the heroine when she crosses gender boundary and on her suffering from female desire when she is on battlefield; namely, it provides more information on how the protagonist constructs her gender identity. This is perhaps because identity formation is a crucial issue in adolescence, and by giving more depictions on the formation of gender identity Dong's novel asserts that the normative gender behaviour can be resisted during the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

II. From 1977 to Present: Multiple Images of the Heroine

Along with the rapid change in political and social environments in China and Taiwan, the

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個十足的女人，她的雄心卻如一個男子。可喜的是：她這一次兩者兼得，不必爲有所缺憾而憂鬱。

images of Mulan in the second half of the twentieth century have become multi-faceted. After 1949, China and Taiwan has each undergone very different transitions in many aspects, which has to some extent influenced the image construction of Mulan in her retellings produced from the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. Because 1976 marked the end of the ten-year Cultural Revolution, which has had a great impact on gender representation in the Mulan retellings published afterwards in China, this section will therefore include the retellings launched on the market from 1977 to the present. It is probable that no retellings were produced during the Cultural Revolution, as literary production was brought to a halt in that period. The database of the National Beijing Library does not list any Mulan retellings produced during the Cultural Revolution period, and the retellings published in the 1970s and the 1980s are reprints of versions which were published in the 1950s. The first Mulan retelling following the Cultural Revolution was not published until 1990. Because the images of women in China changed drastically during the Cultural Revolution and this in consequence had great impact on gender construction of the characters in the Mulan retellings in China, I will explore the change of women's images during this period before embarking on the analysis of the following retellings.

During the Cultural Revolution, "the erasure of gender and sexuality" (性別抹殺) was a common phenomenon in China. Women were greatly encouraged to behave in a neutral way: "in many social situations, gender became an unmarked and neutralized category, its role as a vessel of self-identity was greatly diminished, and it lost its significance in gender politics, which was replaced by class politics" (Mayfair Yang, 41). As the documentaries or photos taken during the period have shown, it was common for women to cut their hair short and put on olive green army clothes with a cap. They were also encouraged to perform work traditionally defined as male labor because it was believed that the emancipation of women could be achieved through their participation in the formerly male-only labor force. The erasure of gender and sexuality was a means to become emancipated for women at that time. However, as Janet Elise Johnson and Jean C. Robinson observe, "gender erasure was taken to extremes: physical markers of femininity such as cosmetics, long hair and skirts were attacked as counterrevolutionary, and a unisex gender ideology, based on peasant masculinity, prevailed" (8). That is to say, Chinese women were encouraged to behave not really in a neutral way, but in a masculine way. The erasure of gender was in reality the erasure of femininity; therefore, the emancipation obtained through the erasure of femininity cannot be real emancipation for women.

The unisex phenomenon did not last long in China. Chinese women nowadays are encouraged to behave in a more feminine way under the promotion of consumer industries. The transformation of women's image in the second half of the 20th century in China perhaps is best demonstrated from the case of a woman writer Tang Lifei interviewed by Mayfair Yang. Tang believed she was "someone without a marked gender" and felt discomfort when she first put on make-up in 1986. However, she gradually found out "[m]akeup has allowed her to discover her feminine side, and she felt a pleasurable thrill when men would turn around to look at her walking down the streets in makeup and elegant clothes" (Yang 49). The new construction of women's image in China, to quote Yang again, "is both product as well as driving force of the new market economy" (49). On top of consumer industries including makeup, clothes, fashion, the mass media such as television programs, magazines, and popular fiction all help to construct a new image of Chinese women. As the retellings often reflect the dominant ideology and assumptions of the time when they are produced, how is the image of Mulan represented in the retellings when femininity was once forbidden and is now reinforced in China? In contrast with China, Taiwan has been more open, and was much earlier open, to western influences in the second half of the twentieth century. Does this mean the reproduction of the heroine in Taiwan is likely to be attributed with western feminist spirit? Or in order to maintain its cultural tie with traditional Chinese cultures, will retellings in Taiwan present an "authentic" heroine, who is merely a replication of a Confucian girl?

In this section, I will explore six Mulan retellings published in China and Taiwan from the end of the 1980s to the present time, encompassing three novels for adult readers, one Beijing opera film, and two novels for young adult readers. Based on different age groups of readers, the analysis will further be divided into two parts: Three novels and one opera movie for adult readers from 1990 to the present; two Taiwanese young adult novels in the 1980s and the 1990s. Besides gender representation, I will also consider the dialogue between various genres and the differences between versions published in China and those published in Taiwan in terms of the reflection of dominant ideology and cultural assumptions. And the most important is to see whether the cross-dressing heroine can enjoy individual freedom and behave beyond social norms in order to escape the control of the deeply-rooted Confucian ideology imbedded in the Mulan narrative which has constrained her for more than one thousand and five hundred years.

Three Novels and One Opera Movie for Adult Readers from 1990 to the Present

Among the three novels included in this section, two are published in China and one is published in Taiwan. Because the two Chinese novels share heavy communist flavor and the gender performance in the Beijing opera film is represented in accordance with historical development in China, I will therefore discuss the retellings produced in China first and place the retelling from Taiwan at the last part of this section as a contrast to the retellings from the Chinese region. Published by Beifang Funü Ertong Chubanshe, literally meaning Northern Women and Children Publisher in China in 1990, Liu Xiusen's *The Biography of Hua Mu Lan* (花木蘭全傳) not only indicates the revival of retelling Mulan's story after the Cultural Revolution in China but also marks the most tragic and heroic Mulan story discussed so far in my collection. From the name of the publisher, it is perceivable that Liu Xiusen's retelling must serve to model exemplary conduct for women and children in China. As the editor summarizes the main spirit of Liu's retelling, "with the soul-stirring story and heroic plot, *The Biography of Hua Mu Lan* constructs . . . a touching image of a legendary maiden who has dual gender attributes and who is loyal, filial, heroic and chaste" (Preface).[26] From the editor's words, it is amazing to see how deeply Confucian thinking has penetrated into Chinese culture, particularly after Confucianism had undergone drastic criticism in the May Fourth Movement and during the Cultural Revolution. Although Confucian thinking has survived in the retelling in 1990s China, the main theme of the retelling has shifted: the climax of Liu's novel is no longer Mulan's army life but her life *after* triumphantly returning home from the battlefield. Pivoting on class struggle between officials and common people, Liu's retelling portrays Mulan as a model for common people, a person who loves her country deeply and is not afraid of authoritarian bullying.

The motif of class struggle is also emphasized in the second Chinese novel, Ming Deyuan and Li Jingye's *Hua Mulan*, published by Jiefangjun Wenyi Chubanshe (that is, The Liberation Army's Literature and Art Publisher) in 2002. From the names of the two publishers, it is not difficult to perceive how Mulan is oriented in modern China: she plays an exemplary role for children, women, and soldiers. The best scene to manifest conflicts between classes in Liu's novel is the concubine plot, which can be regarded as a variant version of Zhou Yibai's opera retelling. Similar to Zhou Yibai's heroine, Liu's Mulan is asked to be the Emperor's concubine; she also refuses the Emperor's command with the

[26] The Chinese text is as follows: 《花木蘭全傳》以其動人心魄的故事，曲折悲壯的情結，塑造了一位…忠孝節烈的奇女子的雙重性格和動人形象。

same reason but rebukes the Emperor in a much more stern way than Zhou Yibai's Mulan does. She furiously tells the Emperor, "I took my father's place in the army because my father was old and sick, and because I intended to prevent this beautiful country from being invaded by the enemy and to prevent common people from suffering national subjugation. I did not do it for you stupid emperor" (201).[27] Again similar to Zhou Yibai's heroine, one of the main reasons Liu's Mulan joins the war is to protect common people. While Mulan before pre-modern times joins the battlefield primarily to demonstrate her loyalty to the Emperor, the modern Mulan has gradually transformed to fight for common people. The difference between Zhou Yibai's concubine plot and Liu's is that the concubine plot is just the starting point of class conflict in Liu's novel, which progressively leads to the war between the common people and the palace.

The second half of this novel is a heroic and touching story depicting the conflict between authority and the common people, a newly added theme to the Mulan story. There are detailed descriptions about how those in authority bully the common people and how official exploitation drives people to rebellion. In Liu's retelling, more and more common people are touched by Mulan's brave act and decide to join the action to rescue Mulan. However, lots of them are killed by the imperial soldiers. In despair they decide to rebel against the imperial government. As one of Mulan's comrades says, "…because the Emperor does not allow us to live we have no choice but to rebel" (306).[28] Their decision to rebel is therefore justified, which is in conformity with one of the most popular slogans in the Cultural Revolution, "to rebel is justified." The struggle between classes is one of the main concerns of communism. Furthermore, the vicious acts perpetrated by the authorities are depicted as even more savage than those by the enemy; Liu's novel seems to suggest that the most ruthless acts of human beings come from the oppression of the common people by those in power in the same society.

Although Mulan seems to be portrayed as a model for the *modern* common people, she is in nature a traditional Confucian heroine. As Eric K. W. Yu has observed, the concubine plot has positioned Mulan to be the spokesperson of Confucian propriety one more time because it is her duty to teach the Emperor that "a subordinate shall not serve his Emperor." According to Yu, she has been sacrificed for patriarchal society at least two times (46). In Liu's retelling, she has become the spokesperson of Confucian doctrines, or

[27] The original Chinese text is as follows: 當初我代父從軍，一爲父親年老多病，二爲中華大好河山不致陷於敵手，天下百姓免遭亡國之難，哪個是爲著你這昏王？

[28] The original Chinese text is as follows:…皇上不叫我們活下去，我們就反了！

has been sacrificed for patriarchal society, at least three times: apart from her cross-dressing act in order to protect the country and her stern propriety lesson for the Emperor, she manifests her loyalty as a subordinate before she commits suicide. When all of her comrades decide to rebel against the imperial government, she hesitates to take action because she still perceives herself as a loyal subordinate in the Sui Dynasty. She exclaims that "Do I really have to become a rebel against the Sui Dynasty? …No, no, I cannot… but the Sui Dynasty does not allow me to survive. What shall I do" (306-7)?[29] Looking up to the sky and uttering a long and mournful cry, she raises her sword and cuts her own throat. Rebellion against the imperial government is against her Confucian practice; she would have gone too far beyond the social norms if she had led the rebels to fight against the Emperor, an act which is completely unacceptable for a Confucian woman in a Confucian society. With no way out, she has to kill herself. Her death can on the one hand reinforce her "proper" conduct based on Confucian propriety, and on the other hand paradoxically strengthen the justification of rebellion against authority by the common people. Under Liu's construction, she is destined to arouse the revolutionary ardor of ordinary people in a tragic and heroic way. She is both a Confucian and communist heroine.

In Ming and Li's retelling, class struggle is often linked with gender issues, such as the governor's taking away females from poor families by force or a husband's beating a wife from a lower social status. In the novel, Mulan is framed and put in jail by a vicious governor because she stopped him from raping a female soldier, but luckily she is saved and released later. The governor's bullying and torturing of common people is depicted as cruelly as in Liu's novel, once again reflecting the main concern about injustice between classes in socialism. Due to the emphasis on the communist spirit and heroic deeds of Mulan, gender performance of the cross-dressing heroine has been downplayed in the two novels; however, they still carry on the spirit passed down from the May Fourth Movement: the main female characters in the two novels are described as brave to pursue their own love and happiness. In Liu's retelling, Mulan meets her husband-to-be while she goes hunting. Admired each other's martial skills, they immediately decide to be life-long partners. In Ming and Li's retelling, Mulan and her husband-to-be had met when they were young children. When they meet again in the army, Mulan tries to give him hints and they become engaged after the war. There is a tendency that the emancipation of women in

[29] The original Chinese texts is as follows: 我真的要做隋朝的叛臣嗎？…不，不能…可是隋朝卻不允許我再活下去。我該怎麼辦？

these two novels is strongly linked with their individual freedom in pursuing love. In Ming and Li's retelling, Mulan arrests a female general from the enemy camp named Hua A Zhen, who can be regarded as the variant version of Lu Wanhua in Zhang Shaoxian's novel produced in the Qing Dynasty. Mistaken Mulan as a male, Hua falls in love with Mulan, and her sexual desire towards Mulan has been rendered in a bold and rare way: she almost rapes Mulan while Mulan is sleeping. Becoming aware of Mulan's gender identity, Hua is heartbroken and ashamed. Mulan consoles her, "I indeed like you, and admire you. You do not do anything wrong. I understand. We both are women. Who does not hope to find a satisfactory man! You pursue love in a bold way; the deep emotion you express is rare and commendable" (205).[30] Expressing love in a bold and direct way is encouraged in Ming and Li's retelling; it explicitly suggests that an emancipated woman should pursue her love with courage.

Generally speaking, the emancipation of Mulan, and other female characters as well, is represented more strongly in the individual freedom to pursue love rather than in the demonstration of gender fluidity in these two novels. That is to say, gender depiction is basically conventional. Ming and Li's Mulan returns home after they have triumphantly defeated the enemy; however, her fiancé is ordered to join another battle, in which he is killed. Mulan swears to love him forever and remains single until her death, manifesting she is a traditional woman. She is endowed as Princess by the Emperor but leads a plain life. She distributes her money to her villagers and often solves problems for them, and therefore earns people's respect. None of the previous Mulan heroines have ever exhibited a social function after returning home; she is the only exception. In conclusion, Ming and Li's Mulan is a heroine who blends attributes from Confucianism and socialism.

Saga of Mulan, a Beijing opera designed for film, is the Winner of two Best Musical Awards in China. Directed by Xiao Lang and Qiu Lili, *Saga of Mulan* received high praise from the critics when it was launched in 1994. Combining Chinese opera performance and cinematic technology, this film presents Chineseness such as art design, calligraphy, and martial art battles in a stunning way. With the intention to promote Chinese heritage, the cross-dressing heroine is represented as a talented woman who is adept with pen and sword; she can also paint and play chess and musical instruments. She is probably the most extraordinary Mulan, but she is surely the most feminine Mulan in the retellings discussed so far. Played by the new generation Chinese actress Bai Shuxian,

[30] The original Chinese texts is as follows: 我確確實實喜歡你，佩服你。你沒有錯，我理解你，我們都是女人，誰不希望找到一個稱心如意的男人。你能大膽追求，是難能可貴得摯情。

Mulan in *Saga of Mulan* forms an interesting contrast to Chang Xiangyu's masculine Mulan in the opera recording. Although both of the retellings are presented in the same genre, a combining genre of film and opera, there are noticeable differences between them. Due to the help of the advanced technology, *Saga of Mulan* is able to present the story in a much more vivacious and interesting way, which in consequence renders the opera film both pedagogic and entertaining. The emphasis on femininity, even while Mulan cross-dresses as a male soldier, makes the opera film distinct from the other Mulan retellings.

To begin with, the cross-dressing heroine in *Saga of Mulan* does not try hard to hide her femininity from the very beginning of her army life. When Captain Jin blames her for her sissy and wimpy behaviour and commands her to go back home, she bursts out crying *like a girl*. Later when she becomes a General in the army, she often commands the soldiers in a sharp female voice, which is radically different from the heroines in some Mulan retellings who try to speak in a low and deep voice in order to disguise their gender identity. Also, the red armour she puts on makes her look more like a female general than a male general. The film literally constructs the "cross-dressing" Mulan as a female from both visual and audio aspects, suggesting that a woman could have a military career without concealing gender identity. Fighting against the enemy on the battlefield and performing one's femininity are not mutually incompatible anymore. Sacrificing femininity becomes unnecessary in *Saga of Mulan*. Performing femininity while she is in the army to some extent asserts Mulan's contribution to the state *as a woman*, which in some way expounds Mao Zedong's famous statement "women hold up half of the sky." Also, the emphasis on femininity is in accordance with its historical development, reflecting the revival and reinforcement of femininity in 1990s China.

Similar to the heroine in Dong Qianli's young adult novel, Mulan in the opera film also experiences identity crisis: One day when she is reading *The Art of War*, she falls asleep and dreams about marriage. She dreams that she is marrying Captain Jin, but suddenly Jin's mother appears and teases Mulan about her gender identity. Mulan cries out loud that she is a woman and awakes from the nightmare. In the opera film, the two roles, Mulan and Jin's mother, are actually played by the same person; they are combined with filmic technology. Hence, the quarrel between Mulan and Jin's mother not only represents Mulan's worry that she may not be able to retrieve a female role but also can be viewed as the conflict of one's two selves and the conflict of two cultures. The young lady stands for the younger self and modern culture; the old lady symbolizes the older self and traditional

culture. In the film, Mulan is unable to deal with the mocking laughter from the old lady so that she awakes from the nightmare with a sense of fright. By doing so, the film implicitly suggests the triumph of traditional culture over modern culture and this in consequence decreases the subjective agency Mulan has enjoyed so far in the film.

One of the innovations the film adds to the Mulan story is that her gender identity is revealed to the whole army before she heads for home. In this film, Captain Jin is heroically killed in their last battle. With inexpressible sadness, Mulan dresses as a woman and visits him in his grave. The "crying over the grave" theme, originated with *Eternal Love*, almost becomes the synonym of regretful love between a couple. While she is lamenting for Jin over his death, all of her surviving comrades appear and find out her secret. After recovering from the shock, they kneel down in front of her to express their respect and admiration. The revealing of her gender secret to the whole army is to reinforce Mulan's contribution to her country as a *woman* rather than as a cross-dressing heroine, which once again reflects the dominant perception about gender and nation which came to exist in China at the beginning of the century: no matter what gender one has, it is everyone's duty to protect the country.

The fourth novel for adult readers *The Heroine of the Northern Country: Hua Mu Lan*, written by Wang Pi-Zhen, was published in Taiwan in 2001. This version is generally based on Chu Renhuo's *The History of the Sui and the Tang Dynasties* (Sui Tang Yan Yi), from which it draws its historical background, the chaotic turn of the Sui and the Tang Dynasties. Here Mulan is recruited in the Turk army and later sent to China to help the Li family to set up the Tang Dynasty. Wang retells the Mulan story in a rare and significantly different way: in his version Mulan has little chance of becoming a great heroine or a model of the nation.

In Wang's retelling, Mulan is from an ordinary and traditional Turk family. Her father, a retired Turk soldier, is depicted as an impotent coward. When the conscription order arrives at his family home, his first reaction is to consider the possibility of exemption from being recruited in the army. Apparently, he is very different from the patriotic father figure in spoken drama retellings produced in the last century, but closer to the weak father in Xu Wei's opera retelling in the Qing Dynasty. It is also hinted in Wang's novel that Mulan's mother only married her father because she was raped by him. She is portrayed as almost hysterical about protecting the chastity of her daughters, and she also believes that a family is unable to survive without a male head. Worrying about the future of the family, Mulan's mother decides to take in a son-in-law to bear their family name and

believes that he will play an adequate role in protecting all the female figures in the family after Mulan's father goes to the battlefield. This is strongly against Mulan's own will because she dreams to marry for love and desires a satisfactory husband. Driven by these circumstances, she leaves home and joins the army in her father's place. Following Chu's heroine, Wang's Mulan does not really get permission from her parents. When the soldiers from the army arrive at their home, she is already cross-dressed as a male and she just follows them to the army. Not knowing how to respond, Mulan's father has no choice but let her go. Therefore, Wang's Mulan goes to war not only to save the life of her ageing father but also to escape a marriage arranged by her mother. Although born from a traditional family, Mulan appears to be agentic because she shows the potential to destabilize normative gender categories and to escape the constraint imposed upon female in a patriarchal society.

Throughout the whole novel, she appears to be agentic only when she decides to join the army and when she determines to extricate herself from a similar position as that of her mother. The second half of the retelling centers on how Mulan gets away from the wrong man, and then finds the right man and wins his love; the issues of family and nation are totally beyond her consideration. Mu Xiang, one of Mulan's comrades, finds out her secret when she is injured. In order to keep her chastity Mulan swears to marry him after the war; nevertheless, she breaks her word not long after she makes the promise. She employs some tactics so that Mu Xiang is not selected to join the war in China and is in consequence forced to separate from her. Her promise is a coerced one. If she keeps her promise, she will be placed in a position isomorphic with that of her raped mother and will be unable to become emancipated. As a moral icon in Chinese history, Mulan's pragmatic conduct is unprecedented.

Apart from the unusual heroine, the narrator in Wang's retelling is exceptional. It does not adopt the serious tone as the other narrators in the Mulan retellings; instead, it sometimes adopts a playful or mocking perspective towards its heroine. On one occasion on the battlefield, General Luo Shi-Xin, Mulan's future fiancé, notices blood around her hips when Mulan is menstruating. In embarrassment, Mulan explains it is the blood of enemies she just killed. Mulan thinks Luo has guessed her secret and decides to follow him for the rest of her life; however, Luo is not aware of her secret at all (184-185). Some of the previous Mulan retellings intend to construct Mulan as a paragon in order to justify her role as a model for common people; Wang's retelling on the contrary humanizes Mulan so that she becomes more like an ordinary human being, or to be more precise, like an

ordinary girl. In Wang's construction, Mulan suffers considerably because she is unable to know the real heart of Luo, who has been depicted as busy and fully devoted to national development. The retelling keeps emphasizing the differences between the world of Mulan and that of Luo; through doing so, it reinforces the traditional view that love is the only concern for women. The potential of destabilizing polarized gender norms Mulan exhibited earlier has been greatly weakened.

Furthermore, Wang's novel perhaps is the Mulan retelling which shows most *disrespect* for the cross-dressing heroine. Aside from making fun of the body of the heroine, although this may create a humorous effect, Wang's retelling has overturned the grand image of Mulan. Suffering from her desire to obtain Luo's love, Mulan drops a hint to him that she is a girl. Mistakenly concluding instead that Mulan is gay, Luo tries to avoid her. Luo believes Mulan is "sick because *he* is fond of men (帶點喜歡男人的病)"; He feels very uncomfortable when Mulan asks him if they will live together in the future and concludes Mulan is trying to "seduce (勾引)" him (239). Despite the disdainful words Luo uses for homosexual, the misunderstanding scene can increase a comic and entertaining effect; however, it to some extent destroys the heroic image of Mulan in readers' minds. In Wang's retelling, the young couple is finally engaged, but Luo is later killed in a battle. After receiving the sad news, Mulan kills herself as well.

It is obvious that Wang's Mulan story, written in the beginning of the twenty-first century, is not produced for the purpose of emancipation for women; instead, the novel reinstates a traditional view of woman at the expense of the legendary achievements Mulan has in the original ballad. Is Wang's retelling qualified to be deemed an example of what Shu-Mei Shih (4) terms "the heteroglossia of the Sinophone"? As Shih observes, "the Sinophone is often the site where powerful articulations against China-centrism can be heard" (31), and so Wang's unusual retelling of the Mulan story might be read as a voice from the Sinophone against China-centrism and orthodox Chinese culture and history.

Two Taiwanese Young Adult Novels in the 1980s and the 1990s

Just as the Sinophone region can be the site to launch powerful resistance against China-centrism, it may also to quote Shih again, "articulate a China-centrism if it is the nostalgic kind that forever looks back at China as its cultural motherland or the source of value, nationalist or otherwise" (31). The following two young adult novels collected in Taiwan belong to the nostalgic kind because they are produced in order to pass down

Chinese heritage, particularly the moral virtues Mulan manifests in the ballad. Both of the young adult novels are entitled *Hua Mulan*; one is written by Chen Chiu-Fan in 1988 and the other by the famous children's fiction writer Guan Jia-Chi in 1998. Chen's novel is a combination of different Mulan retellings; that is to say, it is an old familiar story, in which a seemingly agentic girl begins her cross-dressing journey to save her father's life and the story ends with her returning to patriarchal society. Similar to most of the Mulan retellings, Chen's novel represents Mulan as a moral icon: she is a filial daughter, a loyal subordinate, and a traditional woman who acts according to Confucian propriety. She is, to use Eric K. W. Yu's terms, the spokesperson of Confucianism. A retelling produced to promote Confucian doctrines, which encourages people to stay in one's place and act accordingly, will not be likely to construct the heroine as an emancipated woman.

Admiring Mulan as a perfect woman, Guan Jia-Chi states in the afterword of her Mulan retelling that the cross-dressing heroine she reconstructs is a girl with a modern and feminist spirit (143). Guan's young adult novel is published in Taiwan in the same year as Disney's animated adaptation launched in America and the rest of the world. Without any knowledge of how Disney constructs the image of the heroine, Guan coincidentally begins the story with the motif of marriage and lays emphasis on the relationship between father and daughter and the reasons why Mulan embarks upon the adventure. Similar to the heroine in Disney's adaptation, Guan's Mulan joins the war not only for her father but also for herself because she does not want to have a plain life like her mother's. She wishes to "see the outside world (出去看看外面的世界)" and to "give full play to [her] martial skills and intelligence (好好發揮我的武藝和智慧)" (35). In Guan's retelling, Mulan is a woman who refuses marriage, who is able to decide her future, and who seems to be liberated enough to act beyond social regulations.

When the retelling starts, she is seventeen years old, a rather late age for women to get married in ancient times, and she has already refused marriage several times. While she is in the army, her comrade Liu Yuan-Du finds out the secret when she is injured. After the war, Liu proposes to her, but Mulan turns him down because she regards Liu as her sibling. In Guan's construction, Mulan is so shocked that she remains speechless for several seconds and then she breaks into a laugh. She thinks Liu's proposal is absurd, "This feeling is just so weird. After all, I almost forget I am a girl" (120).[31] A heroine who forgets her

[31] The original Chinese text is as follows: 只是這種感覺太奇怪了，畢竟，我幾乎已經快要忘記自己是個女孩。

gender identity cannot be really emancipated, neither does she have a feminist consciousness.

Moreover, her seemingl subjective agency is not acquired through self-awareness but through the way she has been brought up by her father. The reason why she abhors being like other traditional women is that she has been educated as a boy. "Everyone in the neighborhood knows that Uncle Hua likes his eldest girl Mulan very much. He treats her and educates her completely as a boy" (10).[32] Mulan can have an anti-traditional adventure because of her father's education of her. Her masculine and brave features are obtained through education and training; she is raised up not as a traditional woman but as a "pseudo man." Guan's young adult novel portrays the heroine as an anti-traditional girl who refuses marriage as her destiny, suggesting a different choice and a different ending for the heroine which might in consequence enable her to escape from the Confucian metanarrative of the story; however, Mulan's identifying herself as a male and her father's raising her up as a boy in reality reinforce the stereotypes of polarized gender images because this implicitly suggests only men can have different adventures.

Conclusion

Although the images of Mulan in her retellings produced in the twentieth century have become multiple-faceted, patriarchal concepts of masculinity and femininity still prevail in most of these retellings, which greatly limit the realization of the cross-dressing heroine as a real agentic character. However, in comparison to the Mulan heroines produced in feudal times, Mulan from the 20th century has generally been attributed with a higher level of subjective agency and has enjoyed more individual freedom. In the retellings produced in the first half of the century, particularly the spoken drama retellings, the heroine's subjective agency is often connected with border security; or to put it in another way, it is often granted to the heroine on condition that the nation is at peril. Under these urgent circumstances, the heroine is allowed or even encouraged to venture into traditionally male-defined territory, the battlefield. Nevertheless, the emphasis on the heroine's patriotic spirit and deeds is often constructed at the expense of her gender performance in these patriotic-oriented retellings.

Comparing different retellings of the Mulan story in the twentieth century, it is not difficult to see that the heroine carries different missions at different periods of the century,

[32] The original Chinese text is as follows: 村子裡的街坊鄰居，大家都知道，花大叔十分鍾愛長女木蘭，完全把她當成一個男孩似的栽培養育。

which is in accordance with the shifts in social values or cultural assumptions in Chinese and Sinophone regions. With the modifications of the author, the images of Mulan can be represented in enormously different ways: she can be the spokesperson of Confucian doctrines as she is in most of the retellings; she can be constructed as an emblem of communism as she is in the socialist retellings; she can also be represented as a character with modern or feminist spirit as she is in Dong Qianli's young adult novel. Overall, Dong's retelling and Bai's Beijing opera film bring a surprise to the Mulan story in terms of the heroine's gender performance because Dong's version manifests the possibility of gender fluidity and Bai's version signifies the potential for a female to join the army without scarifying her femininity. Although the subjective agency of the heroine in the two retellings has two some extent been weakened due to her desire to retrieve a traditional role, the two retellings have moved forward in breaking the Confucian metanarrative of the story.

Chapter Three

Gender and Image of China: Mulan in Diasporic and International Contexts

Introduction

The legendary story of the cross-dressing Mulan does not only circulate in Chinese and Sinophone areas; instead, it has travelled to the rest of world with Chinese immigrants over the past several hundred years. Because of the moral values and the Chinese traditions it conveys, the Mulan story has been one of the most popular stories which Chinese immigrant parents would like to pass down to their children from generation to generation. The story about the legendary Mulan has been retold again and again in Chinese immigrant communities all over the world, and it also attracts attention from non-Chinese communities. Maxine Hong Kingston, a second-generation Chinese American writer, retold the Mulan story in her award-winning book, *The Woman Warrior: Memories of A Girlhood among Ghosts*, more than three decades ago. *The Woman Warrior* is favourably received by American press and academia in the world; it is the winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for the best work of nonfiction in 1976 in America and has appeared as a set text in schools around the world as well.[33] Its first chapter "No Name Woman" and the second chapter "White Tigers" are often included in American literary anthologies.[34] The popularity of *The Woman Warrior* not only asserts Kingston's literary achievement as an American canonical writer but also makes a significant contribution to the circulation of the Mulan story in non-Chinese communities in America and the rest of the world.

Like Kingston, who claims her Chinese heritage through retelling stories, Hansheng Yan, a French Chinese, also retold and published the Mulan story on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean in 1998. In the afterword to his novel, Yan declares that he learned *The Ballad of Mulan* at the age of ten and is still able to recite it today, and that he was inspired to write the heroine's story during a trip to China. At the age of sixty he went back to China to visit his father, who was 93 years old and was very ill. While his father was in an unconscious state, he murmured something unintelligibly. Yan tried to listen carefully and found out that his father was chanting *The Ballad of Mulan*. In astonishment, he realized that the story about Mulan must have been taught to Chinese children from generation to

[33] For example, The Woman Warrior has been a regular text for the NSW Higher School Certificate for the past 20 years, and appears in the 2009-2012 syllabus under the theme 'Belonging' in Australia.

[34] For the American literary anthologies in which "No Name Woman" and "White Tigers" are included, refer to Huang, Hsin-Ya's "Imagining the Chinese Woman Warrior: Maxine Hong Kingston's Fa Mu Lan," p.179.

generation (232). Admired by the loyal and filial spirit Mulan illustrates, Yan translates an anonymous version of the heroine's story into French in order to disseminate Chinese values and traditions to children in the French speaking region.

Besides writers with Chinese cultural backgrounds, writers from different cultures are also interested in retelling the Mulan story in their own languages. The Japanese novelist Yoshiki Tanaka's *The Legendary Heroine*, the Belgian writer Laurent Divers' *La Légende de Mulan*, and the American young adult novelist Cameron Dokey's *Wild Orchid: A Retelling of* "*The Ballad of Mulan*" can serve as good examples here. As a great fan of Chinese literature and history, Tanaka has published a few novels set during the change of dynasties in Chinese history in Japan. He also translated some classic Chinese novels such as *Sui Tang Yan Yi* (The History of the Sui and Tang Dynasties), in which Mulan is portrayed as a minor character in the story.[35] Divers' Mulan retelling is written in French and first published in Belgium in 2001 and later in China in 2002. His retelling is apparently influenced by Disney's animated adaptation, particularly in the ways it constructs the images of China and the heroine. Dokey publishes the Mulan retelling for young adult readers in 2009 in America as part of her endeavours in the Once upon a Time series, including the retellings of Snow White, Beauty and the Beast, and Sleeping Beauty.

All retold in the genre of novel, the five Mulan retellings (Appendix Three) are produced outside the Chinese and Sinophone regions and published in languages other than Chinese: three in English, two in French, and one in Japanese. According to the cultural background from which the retelling is produced, the discussion in this chapter will be divided into two parts: Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and Yan's *Hua Mulan: Femme-Générale de La Chine Antique* in a diasporic context, and Tanaka's Japanese novel and the two young adult novels from Belgium and America in an international context. If the cross-dressing heroine cannot be fully emancipated in the retellings produced from the Chinese and Sinophone regions, can she be constructed as an agentic character in the retellings from the different regions of the world? What kind of narrative is possible outside the Chinese and Sinophone regions? Besides gender representation of the heroine, the following discussion will also explore how the diasporic Mulan text mediates between Chinese culture and diasporic culture, and how the international Mulan text constructs the image of Chinese and Chinese girl.

[35] This version has been discussed in Chapter Two. It is the first time Mulan appears in novel though *Sui Tang Yan Yi* is not really about her story.

Mulan in Diasporic Novels

Although both produced in a diasporic context—one from America and the other from France—Kingston's Mulan retelling is drastically different from Yan's retelling. Kingston literally retells the whole story of the woman warrior in order to create her own story as an Asian American whereas Yan's diasporic text intends to pass down Chinese heritage and Confucian tradition to diasporic children in France so that his story closely follows the Mulan storyline. Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* received strikingly different evaluations when it was published. While the dominant American media praised the book as remarkable, *The Woman Warrior* provoked a hostile response from the Chinese community. The most famous and severest criticism comes from Frank Chin, who labels Kingston's book a "fake book" because its descriptions of China and Chinese literature are distorted (Chin, "Come" 3). Emphasizing the importance of authenticity, Chin further criticizes,

> "She doesn't know Fa Mu Lan," asserts Chin, pacing in the office of his Los Angeles apartment. "Her conception of Fa Mu Lan is racist. Her portrayal of the Chinese—racist! Her portrayal of Chinese culture—racist! Every assertion she makes about Chinese culture is wrong. She says the character for woman and slave are the same word in Chinese. Not so! Just not so! Any Chinese student who studies the language knows that that is not so. And it is so offensive."
>
> Finding a Voice[36]

In response to Chin's accusation of her distorting two Chinese heroic stories through putting General Yue Fei's tattoos on Mulan's back, Kingston explains she is not writing Chinese literature; instead, she is constructing the old Chinese myths in a new American way. Kingston states, "I'm saying I've written down American myths. Fa Mulan and the writing on her back is an American myth. And I made it that way" (qtd. In Chin, "Come" 50). In his "The Remasculinization of Chinese America: Race, Violence, and the Novel," Viet Thanh Nguyen makes a convincing explanation of Chin's fury and wrath. Nguyen argues that Chin's offensive is not only due to his demand for cultural authenticity but also

[36] "Finding a Voice." *Mercury News* 30, June, 1991. http://www.sarasolo.com/mn2.html access on the 2nd February, 2009.

because it is the disempowerment of the male body which really enrages Chin:

> Chin is offended by Kingston's version of the Fa Mulan legend not only because it is a distortion of Chinese legend but also because it signifies the affirmation of the female body's materiality as bearer of both history and vengeance. In Kingston's version, *The Woman Warrior* (1976), Fa Mulan's body is tattooed with her parents' words; these words record what was done to their village and family, and serve as a reminder of what Fa Mulan must do. Kingston's story is thus more than just a story about a woman performing as a man, but a story about a woman who *is* masculine: a woman whose body is marked by violence, is the vehicle of violence, and is the embodiment of violence. (150)

Criticizing Chin as a sexist and historical fundamentalist, Nguyen remarks that "Chin uses a cultural-nationalist model based upon ethnic descent and self-determination that privileges authenticity and purity" (151). In contrast to Chin's authenticity and purity, what Kingston creates in her work is hybridity, which enables her to link the cultural past with the cultural present. As Lan Dong observes, *The Woman Warrior* is "not a presentation or a 'fake' of a Chinese legend but a 'combination' of her Chinese cultural heritage and her present American life into her Chinese American identity as a woman enabled to write her own history and invent her own representation" (222). Indeed, it is necessary for Kingston to make alterations to the stories she has heard from her mother because the differences mark her departure from Chinese heritage towards American heritage. Through telling the stories blending Chinese cultural heritage with her American life, Kingston is able to construct her identity as a Chinese American, who is neither a pure Chinese nor a pure American, who manifests hybridity in her identity and her creative works.

The second chapter of *The Woman Warrior*, "White Tigers," is Kingston's version of the Mulan legend. "White Tigers" consists of two woman warriors' stories, the story of a Chinese swordswoman and the story of a Chinese American woman fighter, namely Kingston herself. By juxtaposing two woman warriors' stories, Kingston's diasporic text apparently intends to bring out a contrast between the two stories. In the first section, she constructs the Mulan story by weaving her dream with the talk-stories she heard from her mother. She begins the story with the two "choices" for Chinese girls: being wives/slaves or swordswomen/heroines. As she puts it in the story, "… we learned that we failed if we grew up to be but wives or slaves. We could be heroines, swordswomen" (19).

Substantially different from the common weaving scene in the Mulan story, the beginning of Kingston's retelling signifies multiple choices for women and implicitly denotes that Kingston's version of the Mulan legend no longer reproduces Confucian assumptions.

As many others including Robert Lee (1991: 59) and Huang Hsin-Ya (2001: 187) have pointed out, Kingston's Mulan does not leave home due to filial piety. She does not fulfil the services to the emperor in her father's position; instead, she has her own mission. She follows the call of a bird to the remote mountains and decides to become a woman fighter at the age of seven. Her martial skills are taught by an old man and an old woman, who are immortal and possess the power of magic. Unlike most of her predecessors, who defend the borders from the intrusion of foreigners, Kingston's heroine leads revolutionary peasants to fight against the emperor and she herself executes the baron who has long exploited her villagers. Kingston's heroine is neither a filial daughter nor a national heroine; she is a swordswoman who seeks revenge for the injustice perpetrated upon the peasants and her villagers. She is the saviour of common people. What also makes Kingston's heroine unique is that she does not seem to be troubled by female identity during her cross-dressing journey; instead, performing femininity empowers her to be stronger and even more influential. In Kingston's retelling, the representation of femininity is often manifested through Mulan's performing as a mother figure.

Firstly, the depiction of menstruation symbolizes that Mulan has reached puberty and is capable of being a mother. Menstruation does not stop her from training because she feels she "[is] as strong as on any other day" (30). The coming menstruation does not bring any differences to Mulan's daily training routine and neither does performing maternity to her public mission. Under Kingston's construction, Mulan performs motherhood even before she becomes a real mother.

> I inspired my army, and I fed them. At night I sang to them glorious songs that came out of the sky and into my head. When I opened my mouth, the songs poured out and were loud enough for the whole encampment to hear; my army stretched out for a smile. (37)

Through the act of feeding the army with lullabies, Kingston's Mulan performs femininity as a mother. Also, the depiction of maternity is elaborated still further when she becomes a real mother. How she hides from battle in order to give birth, how she nurtures her baby on the battlefield and how "any high cry [makes] the milk spill from [her] breasts" (41) all

represent the cross-dressing heroine as a mother figure. Thus although Kingston's heroine hides her gender under male disguise, she does not really sacrifice her femininity. In the story, she is allowed to reunite with her husband, become pregnant and even give birth on the battlefield. In this aspect, she is almost indistinguishable from those women who stay home because she continues performing femininity as a wife and a mother. Performing femininity does not hinder her masculine mission and vice versa. Performing femininity and masculinity mysteriously complement each other, enabling her to become a powerful human being. This can be illustrated particularly through her pregnancy.

Pregnancy not only makes her become more feminine but also endows her with a masculine appearance. "When I became pregnant, during the last four months, I wore my armour altered so that I looked like a powerful, big man" (39). Pregnancy which is supposed to enhance her femininity on the contrary develops her masculinity and enables her to become a bigger and more powerful man. With both feminine and masculine features she is androgynous; or to use Sheng-Mei Ma's terms, Mulan manifests "ambiguity of gender" (67). "Now when I was naked, I was a strange human being indeed—words carved on my back and the baby large in front" (39-40). She has a masculine mission as an avenger and a feminine mission as a mother to accomplish at the same time. By portraying the heroine as a pregnant soldier with a list of grievances on her back, Kingston's heroine manifests the possibility of gender fluidity and the potential to destabilize normative gender categories.

In the scene of executing the baron, Kingston's Mulan continues performing androgynous features. After she has accomplished her mission with the peasants, she still has one more mission, which she has to accomplish alone: executing the baron, symbol of injustice, with her own hand. Although she is still in male disguise, she does not hide her gender identity when she meets the enemy she has long sworn to take revenge on. When the baron asks, "Who are you?", Mulan answers "I am a female avenger" (43). However, the baron misunderstands what she means. As Ma elaborates, "[the baron] takes it to mean 'a male avenger for women' rather than 'a *woman* avenger.' The baron then attempts to curry favor 'man to man'" (67).

> "I am a female avenger."
>
> Then—heaven help him—he tried to be charming, to appeal to me man to man. "Oh, come now. Everyone takes the girls when he can. The families are glad to be rid of them. 'Girls are maggots in the rice.' 'It is more profitable to raise

geese than daughters.'" He quoted to me the sayings I hated. (43)

The baron's contempt for females proves the necessity that Mulan has to emphasize her gender identity at the very beginning. Girls are not maggots in the rice; girls can be more useful than geese; girls can be heroines, swordswomen, and avengers for the family. When he denies the crimes he has committed, Mulan rips off her clothes in order to show him her back (44). As Ma observes, Mulan's act of showing the inscriptions on her back to the baron shocks him "not so much by the tattooing as by her bare breasts" (67). Her breasts denote that she is a female, a real female avenger. The two words "female avenger" is itself androgynous and thus anti-traditional. Traditionally, it is the son, or the male, of the family who is responsible for taking revenge on the family's enemy. Mulan declares "I am a *female* avenger," conveying that she is inflicting vengeance—a masculine task—as a female. She is seeking revenge for the injustice perpetrated upon not only her villagers but also the girls, the *females* who have long been treated with prejudice in the history of China. In Kingston's construction, Mulan therefore is an emancipated woman, who is capable of taking revenge for injustice, who is able to "travel" between the polarized gender norms.

However, the ending of Kingston's Mulan story coincides with how Kingston describes her American life. It is not merely disappointing but also shockingly traditional. After she finishes her public mission, she goes back home, to be more precise, her husband's home rather than her parents' home. That is to say, she returns to the position demarcated by Confucian regulations for women. As she says to her parents-in-law at the end of the story, "'[n]ow my public duties are finished,' I said. 'I will stay with you, doing farmwork and housework, and giving you more sons'" (45). This is how Kingston's Mulan retelling ends. Although it is not clear if Kingston's Mulan continues enjoying subjective agency after she returns to patriarchy, her resumption of a traditional female role at the end does signify that there will be little chance for the once-emancipated heroine to be free from Confucian regulations. But why cannot Kingston's Mulan escape traditional destiny if, as Huang Hsin-Ya suggests, "the Mu Lan story in 'White Tigers' is meant to be read in an American context" (185)?

Kingston's Mulan cannot be emancipated at the end of the story not only because of Confucian ideology deeply embedded in the story but also because neither Kingston nor Mulan can really change Confucian culture. In Kingston's retelling, Mulan at least overturns the story by moving away from defending China and by joining the war without

sacrificing femininity; she is also a heroine with modern spirit as she values justice and the rights of common people more than loyalty and obedience to authority. Although Mulan can only return home to be but a wife at the end, Kingston herself, the second heroine in "White Tigers," is both a wife and a swordswoman. While the Chinese swordswoman loses her subjective agency once she finishes her public mission, Kingston does not suffer from losing subjective agency because she can perform both a public and private mission at the same time. Performing as a mother or a wife does not restrict her from being a swordswoman; on the contrary, she can become even stronger and more powerful. As Kingston states in the second section of "White Tigers," "[m]arriage and childbirth strengthen the swordswoman, who is not a maid like Joan of Arc. Do the women's work; then do more work, which will become ours too" (48). Marriage and childbirth indeed strengthen both of Kingston's heroines, but the difference is that for the former the battle she joins is temporary whereas being a swordswoman is a lifelong task for the latter.

Also, Kingston's construction of China and the Chinese swordswoman to a certain extent manifests a western Orientalist view. Through the two different swordswomen's stories, China and Chinese heroine are constructed as exotic Other, who helps to serve the subject position of the west, or Chinese Americans in this case. Under Kingston's construction, Chineseness is fascinating and appealing. The ways through which Mulan is trained as a fighter, the use of magic, the immortal couple, how Mulan gives birth on the battlefield, and the combination of various Chinese legends all construct China and the Chinese heroine as a fascinating and exotic Other. Also, the depiction of the cruelty of Chinese people is Orientalist as she puts it in her first story, "Chinese executed women who disguised themselves as soldiers or students, no matter how bravely they fought or how high they scored on the examinations" (39). Among the retellings of the Mulan story collected in the Chinese and Sinophone areas, none of them suggests that Mulan is executed after her gender identity is revealed. Instead, all of her comrades, together with the emperor, admire her for her great achievements. In a few versions Mulan is imprisoned after she returns to the palace, but it is because the emperor forces her to be his concubine and she turns him down. That she is taken into custody has nothing to do with her disguise as a male soldier. Furthermore, other cross-dressing heroines, such as Chuntao in Xu Wei's opera *Female First-place Scholar Declines a She-phoenix and Gets a He-phoenix* (女狀元辭凰得鳳), or Zhu Ying-Tai in *Eternal Love*, are not executed after their gender identities are disclosed. In the stories, their cross-dressing acts either as a high-ranking official or a

student are depicted positively. Chuntao's capability and her achievement in officialdom are highly praised; that is also why the prime minister desires her to be his daughter-in-law. Chinese do not physically kill women who disguise themselves as men. In some of the Mulan retellings, the heroines, together with Zhu Ying-Tai in *Eternal Love*, do commit suicide at the end of the stories. As Huang Hsin-ya suggests, these cross-dressing heroines are "metaphorically killed by the patriarchal textual violence so that the stability of the Confucian social order can be secured" (186). However, the change from metaphorical killing cross-dressing heroines to physical killing exposes the Orientalist point of view and assures the object position of China as Other. Moreover, the depiction of Chinese executing women who disguise themselves as males may well be interpreted as truth for foreigners; for example, Kinston's depiction is possibly the source of Disney's use of this idea.

Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* is the first Chinese American story to be positively received by white readers in America. The popularity of her book in some ways denotes that the point of view on Chineseness adopted in the book is in conformity with those of white bourgeois readers. As Ma aptly puts it, "only those Asian Americans who compose, more or less, in alignment with such Orientalism stand a chance in emerging among mainstream Western readers as representative ethnic voices" (xiii). Kingston has no choice but to employ the West's Orientalist view of China if she wants her book to be accepted in the dominant white society. She has to present Chinese culture in terms of old tradition, conservation, mystery and sometimes incomprehensibility so that the description of China or Chinese people can fit into the imagination of the West. The image of the Chinese swordswoman she constructs somewhat reflects the West's imagination about Chinese heroines. That is to say, the Chinese heroine has to be legendary, mysterious, rebellious and very traditional at the same time. She has the modern and western rebellious spirit but she is in nature a Confucian girl. That is also why she is happy to identify herself as a slave, who is willing to do more farmwork and housework for the family of her parents-in-law, and as a "tool of production," who is willing to give more *sons* in order to carry on the family line for her parents-in-law's family. Yes, more sons, not girls. She is allowed to be anti-traditional only temporarily and eventually has to return to her assigned role. The story of a seemingly rebellious but in nature traditional heroine can justify and satisfy westerner's imagination about Chinese heroines.

Kingston's story is different. Although her American life is very disappointing as she describes, she has an important public mission to accomplish—to avenge all the wrongs imposed on her, her aunt, her family, oppressed women and Chinese Americans. Different

from the swordswoman, Kingston does not have a sword; instead, she has words. She has so many words—"'chink' words and 'gook' words too"—that can take revenge for her family (53). With the equipments of words and the spirit of a swordswoman, she is able to fight against the sexism girls experience in the Chinese community and the racism Chinese immigrants face in the white American society. As Lin Mao-Chu argues, "Kingston finally became a woman warrior through the act of writing" (259). Furthermore, words can be more effective than swords in taking revenge on injustice. As Kingston states, "[t]he idioms for *revenge* are 'report a crime' and 'report to five families.' The reporting is the vengeance—not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words" (53). Through spreading the words, the purpose of vengeance can be achieved. Inheriting the power of "talking stories" from her mother, Kingston can talk the stories to the world, the best way of spreading words and reporting sexual and racial injustice. She makes it, and the success of her stories even exceeds her expectation. As David Leiwei Li argues, *The Woman Warrior* is "a book that changed forever the face and status of contemporary Asian American literature" (44). Through retelling the stories heard from her mother, Kingston creates her own version of stories—diasporic texts which link her Chinese cultural heritage and her life in America. By doing so, she constructs herself not only as a Chinese American but also a modern woman warrior, a female avenger, who does not need to sacrifice femininity while taking revenge for sexism and racism.

In comparison with Kingston's retelling, in which the storyline has been drastically altered, Yan's French version of the Mulan story generally follows the Mulan metanarrative so that his Mulan differs little from her predecessors as described in the previous two chapters. On the title page of *Hua Mulan: Femme-Général de la Chine Antique*, it is written that this version is translated from an anonymous version and modified by Yan Hansheng with the contribution of a French couple, Marcelle and Pierre Schipers. It is not clear which Chinese version is the pretext of Yan's retelling; apparently, the anonymous novel in the Qing Dynasty is not its original text because the differences between the two texts can be immediately detected. However, the storyline in Yen's retelling is quite similar to those in the Shao Brother's Huangmei opera movie and Chen Chiu-Fan's young adult novel.[37] Because there is no information about the pre-text, it is difficult to tell what

[37] In Yan's novel, the historical background is set in the Northern Wei Dynasty and Mulan is sent to the battlefield to defeat the Huns. However, the king of the Huns is called Tuli Khan, which is exactly the same as the king of the Turks in most of the Mulan retellings. In reality, the king of the Huns is called Chanyu and that of the Turks is Khan. Yan's story is a translated version; it is odd that he misapplies the king of the Turks as the king of the Huns. The "error" about history is unprecedented in the Mulan retellings.

modifications Yan has made in his retelling. Therefore, the following discussion will focus only on the "invention" to the Mulan story and explore its relation to gender representation of the heroine.

Written for young adult readers, Yan's version has one illustration at the beginning of each chapter, summarizing the main theme of the chapter. The most distinct invention in Yan's retelling is the contrast between Mulan and the other female figure A Zheng, and the depiction of the relationship between Mulan and her husband-to-be Li Jun. Similar to the description in Chen's young adult novel, A Zheng falls in love with Mulan because she is touched by "his" loyalty to the state and filial love to "his" father, A Zheng believes that Mulan has the best qualities a man is supposed to have. Portrayed as an obedient and traditional girl, A Zheng forms a remarkable contrast to Mulan, in the sense of how they select their future spouses.

While A Zheng is looking for a man with virtues, Mulan desires a soul mate, which is a rather new idea for Chinese girls in ancient times but a familiar idea for girls nowadays. In Yan's retelling, Mulan has a close comrade – Li Jun – with whom Mulan risks death for the safety of the state, with whom Mulan exchanges and shares ideas, and with whom Mulan plays instruments and dances when there is no war. They are portrayed as the best of friends to each other in the world. It is common that Mulan and her husband-to-be have been described as the right matches in the contemporary Mulan retellings, but marrying a "soul mate" (une amie de cœur) and emphasis on friendship in marriage is a new invention for the Mulan story. Mulan desires someone who shares life experiences with her (215). As she tells Li before heading home, "For me, the ideal woman would be the one who shares with me not only happiness and misfortune during times of peace but also the hardship in time of war" (215).[38] A man's capacity for sharing and communicating becomes an important consideration for the heroine when she chooses a husband; a virtuous man is not qualified enough to be her husband. In contrast to A Zheng, who docilely follows traditional standards, Mulan's desire for a soul mate as her spouse has to some extent transformed her into a heroine with modern spirit.

Not surprisingly, the ending of Yan's retelling is very traditional. Although Yan has portrayed his heroine with a modern spirit, enabling her to have more freedom in choosing a husband, retelling the story based on a conservative text means there is little

[38] The original French text is as follows: Pour moi, la femme idéale serait celle qui partage avec moi les bonheurs et les malheurs du temps de paix, mais aussi les épreuves du temps de guerre. The English translation is mine.

possibility for the heroine to escape the Confucian metanarrative of the story. Yan's diasporic text ends with Mulan seeing her husband-to-be off and waiting for him to come back to marry her—a familiar traditional ending scene of the Mulan retelling, which strongly signifies that the order of patriarchy disturbed by Mulan's cross-dressing act will soon be resumed and therefore suggests that Yan's heroine is not a real emancipated heroine.

Despite the fact that diasporic communities are often more conservative over time than the country of origin, a diasporic Mulan text ideally can mediate between Chinese heritage—Confucian tradition—and living experience in a diasporic environment, and further construct an alternative Chinese femininity. However, this is not the case for the two Mulan diasporic texts discussed above. Kingston's Mulan story is restricted by its Orientalist view on China and Chinese girls, and Yan's Mulan story has been constrained by persisting Confucian ideology and its pedagogic mission to promote Chinese traditional values to diasporic children in France. Their portrayals of the cross-dressing Chinese heroine have basically followed a traditional point of view without demonstrating a potential to provide a different story, or an alternative Chinese femininity. However, the modern swordswoman, Kingston herself, is the one who has a different destiny because performing femininity—to be a wife or a mother—will not hinder her from fulfilling her public mission. Her story as a woman warrior will continue on, and will notstop when she marries or becomes a mother. But it is also noteworthy that Kingston is not a Mulan heroine: her triumph in escaping Confucian destiny is because she is a modern Chinese American rather than an ancient Chinese heroine, and also because her story is essentially very different from the Mulan story.

Mulan in International Novels

Whether Mulan's story is strikingly unusual, or because the merits she demonstrates are universally approbated, more and more writers without Chinese cultural background are involved in retelling her story. This section will encompass three international Mulan retellings: one from Japan, another from Belgium, and a third from America. Written for adult readers, Yoshiki Tanaka's *The Legendary Heroine* was first published in Japan in 1991, and later published in Chinese translation in Taiwan and Hong Kong in 1996. Laurent Divers and Cameron Dokey both retell the Mulan story for young adult readers, which probably reflects a tendency for western writers to be more likely to construct the Mulan story for younger audiences. The images of China and the Chinese heroine in the

international contexts present a striking contrast, which to some extent exposes how they look at China and Chinese girls. Pivoting on the image representations of China, or Chineseness, and the cross-dressing heroine, the following discussion will also explore how the three international contexts reweave the Mulan story through negotiating eastern ideology and western ideology.

To begin with, Tanaka's *The Legendary Heroine* probably is the first Mulan novel retold by a non-Chinese author. Majoring in Japanese language and literature, Tanaka, though mostly identifying himself as a novelist, is by no means only a novelist. He is a researcher and a critic. In order to increase the authenticity of his Mulan retelling, Tanaka spent much time researching Mulan and Chinese history. In the afterword, he even "jokes" that he never studied so hard since he completed his master degree. After reading all of the relevant data, Tanaka found the information was confusing and there were no reliable historical documents about Mulan; he therefore set the historical background of his Mulan story at the turn of the Sui to Tang Dynasties, his expertise in Chinese history (271-273). In 1991, his version of the Mulan story was finally published in Japanese; however, this is not the first time in history that the Chinese cross-dressing heroine meets her Japanese readers/audience.

In 1942, during WWII, Bu Wancang's film production *The Woman General* was exported to Japan, China's enemy country then. Tanaka mentions in the afterword that his father saw this film with his friends and that Mulan was played by one of the most beautiful Chinese actresses, Chen Yunshang (269). Even though Tanaka did not watch the film when he was young, he must have been impressed so much by the Mulan story that he decided to write her story in Japanese fifty years later. As a big fan of Chinese history, Tanaka takes a great deal of effort to present Chineseness as accurately as possible. His description of China is so elaborate that even the Taiwanese editor is amazed and exclaimed that she had never heard of or read most of the unofficial documents Tanaka provided in the story (editor's preface, 1). It is true that Tanaka's representation of China or Chineseness is so detailed that even people from Chinese culture would be fascinated, but his portrayal of China to a degree reflects how Japanese look at China.

For example, Tanaka tends to give a full description of the background information, such as the sibling war among the emperor's sons, the structure and design of palace buildings, the political, social systems China practiced, even the classification of the emperor's concubines. The prosperous and booming scene, though it probably comes from Tanaka's research, in some ways reflects how Japanese look at China in the Sui and Tang

Dynasties, the time when Japan and China started having more cultural and financial interactions. Presenting Chineseness in an elaborate way — for example, details about how the architect constructs the imperial palace and or the international trade market is built up — not only enhances the authenticity of Chineseness but can also satisfy the desire of Japanese readers for thickness of representation.

Besides its carefully researched presentation of Chineseness, Tanaka's version also stands out from all the other diasporic and international Mulan retellings in terms of its genre and narrative strategy. *The Legendary Heroine* is not only a fiction; it is also a historical document and a critique. Apart from its elaborate details about historical events which Tanaka has drawn from his research, the narrator of *The Legendary Heroine* often expresses his criticism of the validity of historical events and documents, and even of the characters in his retelling. For example, when dealing with the death of the Emperor Wen of Sui (541-604), the narrator makes a comparison among the official and non-official documents. According to the anecdotal history, the Emperor Wen was murdered by his second son, the Emperor Yang of Sui, the most famous tyrant in Chinese history, and this is widely believed to be so. However, the narrator points out the differences between the official and non-official documents and draws the conclusion that it was unnecessary for Emperor Yang to kill his father because Emperor Wen was already seriously ill at the time. Also, when describing the series of battles at the end of the Sui Dynasty, the narrator suddenly makes a digression to show that some plots in *Sui Tang Yan Yi (*The History of the Sui and Tang Dynasties*)* are not in conformity with the official documents.

The narrator of *The Legendary Heroine* is not only critical but also ironical and humorous. In the retelling, when Goguryeo (高離), China's neighbour country, breaks the contract with the Sui, the narrator's comment on Emperor Yang is comically ironic. Goguryeo is an ancient Korean Kingdom located between southern Russia and the northern and central parts of modern Korea between 37BC and 668 AD. Goguryeo's expansion conflicts with the interests of the Sui; Emperor Yang therefore launches in total three attacks on Goguryeo during his reign. Although the Sui won the wars, Goguryeo's promises of submission and paying tribute are never fulfilled. When describing the responses of the subordinates of the Sui to Emperor Yang's rage at Goguryeo, the narrator coldly states that "none of the subordinates has any response to his anger because under the sun only Emperor Yang would believe that Goguryeo will keep their promises" (132).[39]

[39] The original Chinese text is as follows: 群臣對天子的憤怒情緒毫無反應。因爲天下只有煬帝一個人

Instead of pointing out the stupidity of Emperor Yang, the narrator comments in an ironic way, "Emperor Yang is so *terrific* that he believes the contract will be kept" (italic mine; 132).[40] The irony employed here also brings a comic effect. Reading *The Legendary Heroine*, readers can on the one hand experience a special journey with the Chinese cross-dressing heroine and on the other hand gain knowledge about Chinese history, and at the same time are amused to see the critical point of view of the scholar narrator.

In addition to the unique narrator, Tanaka's version also presents the story and gender image of the heroine in a very different way. Unlike all the other Mulan retellings, in which the sequence of events is in a chronological order, Tanaka's story employs a backward sequence. When the story starts, Mulan is already in the army and is waiting for the Emperor to call the roll in front of the Great Wall, the symbol of China particularly for non-Chinese. On such a serious occasion, Mulan plucks a flower from the ground. Another soldier, He Ting-Yu, stands on her left hand side, interestingly looks at her and the flower (7). By this time, Mulan and Ting-Yu have already become very good friends. Dressing as a male soldier on the battlefield, the cross-dressing Mulan is supposed to perform masculinity; however, her act of plucking a flower denotes femininity and at the same time also reveals how Tanaka constructs gender for his heroine. In Tanaka's retelling, Mulan is presented as having delicate features; she is small and short so her future husband Ting-Yu always helps to carry her luggage on their way to the battlefield. She is so pretty that almost every one of her comrades, except Ting-Yu, is suspicious of her gender in their first encounters.[41] She is good at archery but less good at other forms of martial arts so Ting-Yu saves her life several times during their fighting with the enemies. Also, when some drunken soldiers tease Mulan about her gender behavior, Ting-Yu always beats them up. Tanaka's Mulan perhaps is the only heroine who needs the protection of her man to such an extent. His portrayal of Mulan is somewhat bizarre because the weaker image of Mulan may not be able to justify her ability to join the war. If a heroine is unable to carry her own luggage to battlefield, how can she fight against foreign intruders? However, a relatively weaker Mulan can challenge the idea that only a masculine cross-dressing heroine can survive on the battlefield. A feminist heroine, though cross-dressing is essential in the Mulan story, does not need to hide femininity; she is able to complete the mission on her own. The problem with Tanaka's heroine is that she is presented as incapable of coping

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相信高離國王會守約入朝。

[40] The original Chinese text is as follows: 居然會相信這種約定，也真是了不起。

[41] The first time Ting-Yu and Mulan met, Ting-Yu thought Mulan looked like a girl and "his" name sounded like a girl's name too, but he never did really suspect "his" gender identity.

with problems or challenges; her husband-to-be always appears at crucial moments to help her and save her. Ting-Yu has to save her life not only on the battlefield but also in the imperial palace.

In Tanaka's retelling, Mulan is secretly asked to "disguise" herself as a palace maid in the middle of her army career. Her mission is to sneak into the imperial quarters where the concubines live and to urge the Queen to admonish the Emperor not to let the destruction of the Sui happen. But after seeing the Emperor lead a dissolute and absurd life in person, Mulan is bitterly disappointed and her mission fails. While Mulan is eluding the imperial pursuing troops, she bumps into Ting-Yu, who helps her to escape from the imperial soldiers. Mulan on the one hand worries that Ting-Yu may have known her secret, but on the other, she is disappointed that he seems not to recognize that the young girl in front of him is her. Before she leaves, she gives him half of her jade hairpin as the pledge of love. She tells him, "[y]ou have to wait for me. Do not fall in love with other women; otherwise, I will blame you for the rest of my life" (224).[42] The danger of exposing her gender secret to Ting-Yu becomes the confirmation of their love, which is a new addition to the Mulan story and surely highlights the dramatic effect. When Mulan cross-dresses as a soldier, she is timid about expressing love to Ting-Yu; however, when she "disguises" as a female, she becomes brave and able to perform differently.

In Tanaka's retelling, Mulan experiences an inner struggle when she is asked to "cross-dress" as a woman. After performing as a man for 8 years, Mulan feels awkward to "disguise" herself as a girl. She is used to performing masculinity so it is not easy for her to return to her previous gender position all of a sudden. When femininity has been denied for so many years, performing femininity is like performing another character; that is to say, disguise becomes performativity for Tanaka's heroine. She apparently enjoys performativity because the disguise enables her to become much braver and to pursue love in an active way. Under the disguise, Mulan is performing another character so that she is able to utter what she dared not to say before. In this sense, practicing female performativity to some extent liberates her and in consequence leads to her acquirement of subjectivity.

The subjective agency Tanaka's Mulan enjoys, as her cross-dressing journey, has been described as temporary because there is a strong hint at the ending scene that Mulan is eager to retrieve a traditional female role. In the last scene, walking with Ting-Yu

[42] The original Chinese text is as follows: 你一定要等著我，不要爲別的女人所動心！不然小女子會怨你一生。

towards her parents, Mulan conveys her worry to him "Oh, no! The tone I speak with is like a male's. This really makes me worry what will happen in the future" (266).[43] In the retelling, Tanaka's Mulan is portrayed as weak and vulnerable; she is unable to master an authentic masculine performance but she still worries that she might be too manly in front of her future husband. Her worry reveals that she is incapable of resisting gender norms imposed upon women by patriarchy. Her eagerness to retrieve traditional femininity has greatly restricted her from being an agentic heroine.

Similar to Tanaka's retelling, Laurent Divers' French version *La Légende De Mulan* is first published in the author's country and later published in translation in the Chinese or Sinophone markets. Divers is a Belgium writer, who devotes himself to introducing stories from other countries to children in French-speaking regions; he has retold and published several "foreign" young adult stories, including *Alice in Wonderland*, *Sherlock Holmes* and *The Last Days of Pompeii*. Like Yan's French young adult version, Divers' Mulan retelling also has an illustration at the beginning of each chapter, which encapsulates the chapter's main theme. On the cover page of the Chinese edition, the title of the novel is written both in French and Mandarin whereas the publishing information is written only in Mandarin. And curiously, the name of the Belgian author is written in French while the name of the French illustrator is written in Mandarin. Also, at the bottom of each page there are Mandarin annotations explaining the French sentence patterns and grammar, denoting clearly that the target readers of this young adult version are students of French in China.

Presumably because of its European readership, Divers' Mulan story also includes extended descriptions of China, although there is a contrast in the images of China between Tanaka's and Divers' retellings. While Tanaka tends to construct China as a rich, prosperous kingdom, Divers' China is ancient and mysterious. Divers' presentation of China to some extent reflects how westerners look at China: China is a country which has a long history and things related to China are mysterious and sometimes incomprehensible. Divers' young adult novel starts with the introduction of geography in China and how the Yellow River plays an important role in the development of China in history, and it also gives a clear explanation about the life of Mulan's father, who is the martial arts master from Shaolin temple. Shaolin temple is a Buddhist monastery and it is best known to the western world for its "Shaolin Kung Fu" originating with the Chinese Kung Fu movie *Shaolin Temple* in 1982. The triumph of *Shaolin Temple* not only brought the Chinese actor

[43] The original Chinese text is as follows: 啊，不成，我的語調老是像男人，真叫人擔心將來會怎麼辦呢。

Jet Li to stardom but also successfully broadcast "Shaolin martial arts" to the rest of world, and since then "Shaolin martial arts" has almost become another symbol of China. Divers' novel is the first Mulan version that makes a connection between the heroine and Shaolin martial arts; furthermore, it also provides explanations about the principles of warriors and how the monks are trained in martial arts at the temple. It can in some ways serve as a short guide to martial arts for young reader in French-speaking regions. Through its relationship with martial arts, Divers' Mulan story appeals to an interest in martial arts of western readers.

Providing more details about China and Chinese history in the retelling can enhance the knowledge of its readers and, more importantly, makes the retelling more like a Chinese story, which paradoxically reveals that the retelling is retold by a non-Chinese. While Divers is meticulous in constructing Chineseness, his portrayal of China is somewhat bizarre. For example, the training of the higher level of martial arts is represented as mysterious and forbidden. In the second chapter, entitled "The Forbidden Room," Mulan's father has a special building located at the back of their garden, and he often goes there alone. The building has no windows, and the only door to the room is always locked. Mulan is so curious that she enquires about the room of her mother and the servants, but none of them are willing to answer her questions. The seven-year-old Mulan decides to ask her father, who replies that nothing he does in that room will be interesting for a young girl. Apparently, there is something secret and mysterious going on in the room. One day, the little Mulan decides to find out the truth; she follows her father and inspects what he is doing. In reality, this forbidden room is where Mulan's father practices martial arts. Compared to the other Mulan retellings, in which Mulan's father never hides himself when he practices Kung Fu, Divers' version represents the practice of Kung Fu as something secret and mysterious. It is true that some Chinese Kung Fu novels or movies depict martial arts masters hiding themselves and practising secretly when they are advancing their martial skills to a higher level, but these are special occasions and cannot be practiced as daily routine. In Divers' retelling, practising martial arts is part of the father's daily routine because through regular practice he can maintain the skills and keep his health in a good condition. Although mystery is a common component of *wuxia* fiction, presenting *daily* martial arts practice as mysterious and forbidden will to some extent contribute to an incomprehensible image of China.

Besides that his mysterious China is very different from Tanaka's prosperous China, Divers' representation of the Chinese heroine also contrasts with Tanaka's. While Tanaka's

Mulan is weak, feminine and traditional, Divers' Mulan is curious, active and possesses a somewhat modern spirit. In reality, Divers' construction of Mulan is similar to that of Disney's 1998 Mulan adaptation.[44] Both of the heroines share several similarities. First, both of them are perceivably more active than their predecessors from the Chinese and Sinophone backgrounds: Disney's Mulan is resourceful, and Divers' Mulan is curious and determined. Second, after having undergone an overnight inner struggle, both heroines visit the room where the ancestral memorial tablet is and finally work out a solution to the problem. Apparently, the room for the ancestral memorial tablet, where Chinese worship their ancestors, has become, under the construction of the westerners, an important place for the heroine to engage in meditation. Third, both of the heroines, together with Dokey's Mulan, leave for the battlefield without informing their parents. Among the Mulan retellings in my collection, leaving home without having the permission from parents is a motif which appears only in the Mulan texts retold by westerners.[45] Adopting the same motif in the two western young adult novels shows the power of Disney to establish a motif as a given element of a story. Also, running away from home in order to grow up and then return is a common motif in Western children's literature, and this is probably what Disney is drawing on.[46]

As discussed in the previous chapters, the Mulan retellings produced in the Chinese, Sinophone and diasporic contexts carry important cultural functions, such as transmitting cultural heritage and providing patterns of behaviour to the next generations. A Mulan retelling produced by westerners and retold for western children may have very different functions, such as enhancing knowledge about China and providing patterns of behavior which are more in conformity with western ideology. Often, during the process of retelling a Chinese text for western children, some of the eastern ideology embedded in the story will be replaced by western ideology. That is to say, some of the moral values Mulan demonstrates in her story will be likely lost during transit and substituted by an idea or concept which is more familiar and acceptable for western readers. Obtaining parents' permission is essential in the previous Mulan retellings whereas in Divers' text the heroine's leaving home without informing her parents has been described as a compelling decision: her parents will never agree with her cross-dressing plan. Joining the war without

[44] Disney's animated version of Mulan will be discussed in Chapter Five.
[45] The latest Mulan movie directed by Hong Kong film director Ma Jingle is an exception, which apparently adopts the motif from Disney's animation. This will be discussed in Chapter Six.
[46] For the motif of leaving home in Western children's literature, see Clausen, Christopher. "Home and Away in Children's Fiction." *Children's Literature* 10 (1982): 141-152.

obtaining parents' permission means that the heroine has to take all responsibility for her decision, and by doing so, she is more autonomous and liberal and thus possesses a higher level of subjective agency.

Divers' Mulan also manifests subjective agency in pursuing romantic love. After revealing her gender identity to Leung, her husband-to-be, Mulan bares her heart passionately. She tells Leung, "… you are more than a friend. Because all these years, Leung, I have learned to know you and to love you" (2002; 143).[47] Consistent with her active and determined image at the outset, Divers' Mulan is depicted as a relatively liberal and agentic character near the end of the story. Exposing her true gender identity to Leung does not make her become bashful or worry about if she is able to perform "qualified" femininity; instead, revealing the truth enables her to resist traditional gender norms and to behave in an unexpected way. Compared to Mulan's bold and determined attitude, Leung's response is timid and his way to propose marriage to Mulan is rather conservative:

> —Yesterday, he says, I had a long conversation with your father and I asked myself… (Hier, dit-il, j'ai eu une longue discussion avec ton père et je me demandais…)
>
> —Yes? (Oui?)
>
> —You know that traditionally a woman is supposed to leave her family in order to live with her husband. (Tu sais que la tradition veut que la femme abandonne sa famille pour aller vivre aux côté de son mari.)
>
> —Yes, I know this, Leung. (Oui, je sais cela, Leung.)
>
> —Well, I am wondering if you would accept coming with me to Kiang-Tou where I have to assume my new official post. (Eh bien, je me demandais si tu accepeterais de me suivre à Kiang-Tou où je dois prendre mes functions.)
>
> —Do you want to say that you would like to marry me? (Tu veux dire que tu veux m'épouser?)
>
> She is overwhelmed by great joy. She throws her arms around Leung's neck and says to him: (Une immense joie la submerge. Elle saute au cou de Leung et lui dit:)
>
> —Of course I accept! (Bien sûr que j'accepte!)

[47] The original French text is as follows: …toi qui es plus qu'un ami! Car toutes ces années, Leung, j'ai pu apprendre a te connaître et à t'aimer.

> That's how one day Fa Mulan, the formidable Chinese woman warrior, swapped her horse and weapons for a sweeter conjugal life with Shi Leung. (C'est ainsi que Fa Mulan, la redoubtable guerrière chinoise, troqua un jour son cheval et ses armes contre la voie plus douce de la vie commune avec Shi Leung.) (144-145)

The interesting contrast between Mulan and Leung not only exposes the limitations of stereotypical gender categories, but also challenges the conservative representation of the cross-dressing heroine, and it further provides an alternative femininity and masculinity. Similar to most of the Mulan retellings, Divers' young adult version ends with a strong prediction about the coming wedding between Mulan and Leung. The Mulan story ending with marriage does carry a strong hint that the cross-dressing heroine, who once challenged the stability of patriarchy, will reclaim a traditional female role and that the danger of causing disorder in patriarchal society will no longer exist, but it is not impossible for the heroine to continue performing alternative femininity after marriage. Kingston the woman warrior, for example, performs femininity as a wife while accomplishing masculine mission as a revenger. She does not need to exchange one for the other; she can have both. However, Divers' Mulan can only exchange her horse and weapon for a married life; the subjective agency she once possesses has been diminished due to the exchange.

Cameron Dokey's *Wild Orchid: Retelling of "The Ballad of Mulan"* is a young adult novels in the Once upon a Time series, which collects retellings about world famous females. The cover page of each novel in the series, featuring part of the female body — the breast, to be more precise — strongly suggests that it is a female story, but, curiously, the face of the heroine does not appeared in the photo. The cover of Dokey's Mulan retelling shows only the upper part of the body of Mulan —from lower chin to waist (See Figure 2). The face of the heroine, usually denoting her cultural identity and ethnic background, has been underplayed on the cover page, which indicates that one's cultural identity will not be the focal point of the story; however, with the emphasis on the breast, symbol of female biological sex, the cover page foretells that Dokey's novel will be likely a story about how the Mulan heroine finds romantic love.

Besides the unusual cover page, Dokey's Mulan retelling is so far the first text in my collection to employ first-person narration: most of the Mulan retellings adopt the

viewpoint of a third person narrator, symbolizing her story is governed by a higher voice of, quite possibly, the patriarchy, whereas the narrative voice in *The Ballad of Mulan* consists of first-person narrator and third-person narrator, though most of the story in the ballad is told by the third person narrator. Employing the viewpoint of a first-person narrator means Mulan's story will be told by herself rather than by a higher voice, which suggests that Dokey's Mulan has greater power in controlling her story and in consequence denotes the possibility that Dokey's Mulan will be a relatively free and agentic heroine.

Although Dokey's retelling is told by a first-person narrator, it employs the convention of dual narration by the same character: the older Mulan and the younger Mulan. When the story begins, it is narrated by the older Mulan, who has already undergone the adventure and knows every detail of the whole story. As she narrates, "I sound very wise and knowledgeable for someone not yet twenty, don't I? I certainly didn't sound that way at the beginning of my adventure" (1). Being a first-person narrator, the older Mulan in reality is more like a third person omniscient narrator. She declares clearly the main theme of her story at the outset, "I found the way to show my true face freely, without fear. Because of this, I found true love" (2). Love is what Dokey's heroine will quest for in her journey, suggesting the possibility of escaping the Confucian metanarrative of the Mulan story.

Distinctively different from the previous two Mulan retellings written by non-Chinese authors, Dokey's text in comparison includes rather less description about Chinese history or Chinese cultures. Although it is clear to the reader that the story is set in a Chinese context, the retelling has to some extent been westernized and the story has been reconstructed in accord with western mentality. As in Disney's Mulan adaptation, Dokey's retelling also lays stress on the differences between Mulan and other Chinese girls: as Mulan states in the prelude that she is "[a] girl who had never wanted what other girls want. A girl unlike any other girl in China" (Prelude). It is true that she is not like any other girl in China; she is indeed more like Disney's Americanized Mulan. Following Disney's heroine, Dokey's Mulan at the outset is represented as a social outcast, a child abandoned by her father, who delays his return from the army because of not wanting to see the child who takes away his love. As the younger Mulan describes herself to her best friend, a young boy from the neighbourhood, "Though I'm never going to get married… According to [your mother] there's not a family in all China who'd have me, in spite of the Hua family name. I'm far too unmanageable and wild" (37-38). She is ignored both by her father and the villagers. She cannot identify herself with the villagers where she lives. She

is also similar to Disney's Mulan in that she joins the war without having permission from her father. As I will point out in Chapter Six, constructing Mulan as a social outcast who has joined the army without obtaining permission from her parents has emphasized western individualism, and by doing so the story has attributed Mulan with western mentality.

Also, Dokey's father is a westernized father. Although he is depicted as irresponsible and somewhat cruel at the beginning, he is portrayed as a considerate and encouraging father after he finally returns home. In Dokey's retelling, he is unlike any other man in China because he marries for love.

> But the tale of how my parents came to marry I did hear. It was famous, repeated not just in our household but throughout all China. In a time when marriages were carefully arranged for the sake of family honor and social standing, when a bride and groom might meet in the morning and be married that same afternoon, my parents had done the unthinkable. They had married for love (6).

Dokey's description of marriage in China reveals a western Orientalist viewpoint: Chinese would not get married for love. By distinguishing Mulan's father from the other Chinese men, Mulan's father is in nature a western father. In Dokey's retelling, both Mulan and her father are westernized; or to be more precise, the main characters in her Mulan retelling are all westernized. Mulan's husband-to-be, Prince Jian, is represented as a character who shares the same mentality as Mulan; both of them are people who listen to their hearts. Because they listen to their hearts, they find true love. Does this not sound a familiar western-styled love story? In Dokey's version, the quest for love—both for paternal love and romantic love—has usurped the moral values embedded in the Mulan story.

Overall, the three international Mulan retellings form an interesting contrast to one another in their ways of representing China and the Chinese heroine. While Tanaka's and Divers' texts incorporate abundant descriptions about China in order to construct an authentic Chinese context for their stories, Dokey's retelling gives rather less information about China, implicitly suggesting that this will be a universal story for girls. Also, Tanaka's construction of China is different from the image of China represented in Divers' retelling: to Tanaka, China is a prosperous and rich country which has great influence in the world whereas Divers' China is mysterious, ancient, and even incomprehensible. The remarked discrepancy interestingly reflects the various viewpoints of Japan and a western country on China. Besides the representation of China, the image of the Chinese heroine in

the three international Mulan retellings also reflects a remarkable difference, particularly in their ways of pursuing romantic love. Tanaka's Mulan is a typical Chinese heroine but not a typical Mulan heroine because she is constructed as relatively timid, weak, and traditional in performing gender in comparison with her predecessors. The unprecedentedly delicate image of Mulan in Tanaka's retelling denotes that her story is governed by Eastern patriarchy although it also reflects how Japanese perceive their imaginary Chinese heroine. In contrast to Tanaka's eastern heroine, Divers' and Dokey's heroines both have to some extent been westernized: they manifest a higher level of subjective agency in pursuing romantic love. Both retellings seem to provide an alternative Chinese femininity; however, with the emphasis on pursuing romantic love, the two western Mulan retellings reflect a Western patriarchal ideology. Girls' stories are stories about romantic love.

Conclusion

When the Mulan story travels outside the Chinese and Sinophone regions, neither the potential to provide an alternative narrative for the Mulan story nor the freedom of the heroine to escape the control of patriarchy are guaranteed in the retellings. The target readership of the Mulan texts produced outside the Chinese and Sinophone regions has a great influence upon how the authors present China and how they construct the image of the Chinese heroine. With the purpose to broadcast the traditional values to Chinese French young adults, Yan's diasporic Mulan text has little potential to present an alternative narrative of the story in which the heroine might manifest an alternative Chinese femininity. The orientalist views embedded in the other four retellings have rendered China as a state full of unbelievable stories and surprises. To present China as fascinating or mysterious not only meets the non-Chinese readers' expectation of China but also arouses their curiosity about the Chinese story. However, in order to meet the readers' taste and their imaginary viewpoint on China and Chinese girls, Kingston's and Tanaka's Mulan retellings have accomplished western or Japanese fantasy on China and Chineseness at the expense of their potential in providing an alternative Chinese femininity and an alternative Mulan story. Divers' and Dokey's young adult Mulan retellings do not really provide an alternative Chinese femininity; instead, they have transformed the heroines into western heroines and their stories into western romantic love stories.

Chapter Four

Gender and Visual Image: Mulan in Picture Books and Comics

Introduction

Since the middle of the twentieth century, the story of legendary Mulan has been disseminated both in verbal and multimodal forms. While the verbal form of the heroine's story is mostly produced for adult or juvenile readers, the multimodal form, most often a combination of verbal and visual texts, targets readers of a younger age. Texts produced for children, younger child readers in particular, inevitably merge with pedagogical ideology and hence are a powerful tool for transmitting traditional values and cultures to young generations. Due to the pedagogical feature, texts for children, or children's literature, are, presumably, in nature more conservative and could be slow in responding to social changes and contemporary trends of thought in the world. As many others, including Louie (2001), Ernst (1995) and Jett-Simpson & Masland (1993), have pointed out, the portrayal of gender in children's literature is persistently stereotypical. Girls are often depicted as passive, incapable, sweet, and obedient, whereas boys are typically represented as active, capable, brave, and adventurous. While boys achieve their goals because of their own distinctive capabilities, girls do so often because of assistance from other people.

Mulan's successful cross-dressing act, as remarked in the previous chapters, implies a challenge to the tradition of male superiority and stereotyping of gender roles. The Mulan story, if retold in a provocative way, can provide the younger generations with an alternative gender role and further encourages them to challenge hierarchical gender structures and to adopt an equal view about genders in society. However, gender representation in most of the Mulan retellings discussed in the previous chapters is stereotypical. Often, Mulan is depicted as capable and anti-traditional initially, but gradually becomes passive and traditional toward the end of the story. There is a tendency that the Mulan retellings, written for both adult and juvenile readers, are timid in responding to the world feminist movements. In theory, the Mulan text produced in the diasporic context could be potentially feminist because it is, ideally, a retelling with the intention of negotiating the Chinese cultural heritage of the past with the daily life of the foreign, or western, present. As John Stephens and Lee Sung-ae put it, one of the functions of diasporic literature "is to mediate between cultural history and tradition and everyday life in the society of the host culture" (11). If the diasporic Mulan text is to mediate between Confucian tradition and living experience in the American or French society –

societies which have been strong sources of feminist theory – it might demonstrate a high potential to provide an alternative Chinese femininity and further modify and transform the Confucian tradition.

However, this is not the case for Kingston's and Yan's diasporic Mulan retellings because the former is restricted by the Orientalist view of its readers and the latter aims to promote the Confucian tradition to the diasporic child readers. If the diasporic Mulan text in verbal form fails to accomplish the feminist mission, can the diasporic text produced in verbal and visual forms such as picture book and comics do so? Although texts for children may seem to be conservative in nature, Victoria Flanagan has different findings when she investigates cross-dressing narratives for children and adolescents. She discovers that children's literature has generally been proactive in gender modeling since the 1970s, and can even be said to advocate change (251). Therefore, how do the texts produced for children gender Mulan before and after the 1970s? Will the recent texts written for child readers portray Mulan as an emancipated figure and hereby provide an alternative gender model for young generations when feminist movements have greatly changed women's lives nowadays? In this chapter, pivoting on Mulan's gender performance, I will examine ten Mulan texts presented in the dual semiotic system of verbal and visual narratives for child readers. Among them, five are from the Chinese and Sinophone regions—three from China, one from Taiwan and one from Singapore—and the other five all from the United States—four written by Chinese Americans and one by an American.

Different from the verbal form of the Mulan retellings, in which generation of meaning can only come from words, the word-and-image form of the retellings can produce meaning from words, the visual manipulation of illustrations, and the interaction of words and illustrations as well. With the 'help' of visual narrative, the Mulan retelling may present an alternative story, in which the visual narrative may coincide with the verbal narrative so that a particular gender performance may be reinforced, or the visual narrative contradicts the verbal narrative so that an alternative gender performance could be manifested. Besides gender performance, I will also explore how diasporic culture is represented in the diasporic retellings. Although the ten retellings are written for child readers, they are produced for young readers in different age groups and, strictly speaking, they do not belong to the same genre: seven of them can be classified as picture book; two of them Chinese picture-story books,[48] and one is a comic book. Generally based on

[48] For the definition of Chinese picture-story book, see the following section.

chronological order, the following discussion will be divided into three sections according to genres.

Picture-Story Books from China

Aiming to pass down Chinese cultural and moral heritage to younger generations, picture-story book is a Chinese genre for child readers, in which the story is told by continuous illustrations; usually, there will be a brief verbal description about the story below each illustration (See Figure 5.1.1. and 5.2.1). Picture-story book was one of the biggest sellers in the publishing market in China during the 20th century. It was once the pathway to Chinese classical literature and to fine art for young adult readers in China. Since the 1950s, many talented artists have devoted themselves to producing picture-story books and hereby contributed greatly to the improvement in aesthetic value of picture-story books. Chinese picture-story book reached its climax at the beginning of 1980s, but experienced a sudden decline after 1985.[49] According to Wei Hua, the advance of film, television, and digital technologies changed the reading habit of readers in China and mainly caused the decline of picture-story book. Also, the high repetition of themes, the decrease of qualified picture-story books, and the poor quality in aesthetic performance all contributed to the decline of the once popular literary genre (2007: 30-31). However, the picture-story book market seems to have shown some resurgence at the beginning of the 21st century due to the rapid rise of a collecting craze. Together with new creations of picture-story books, many of the old books have been reprinted. But still, the experts in the fine art industry in China tend be pessimistic about the revitalization of the picture-story book because, according to them, picture-story book is unable to compete with animation and cartoon in the contemporary market.[50]

The two Chinese picture-story books of the Mulan story are published against such a historical background: one published in 1950 and reprinted in 2002, and the other published in 1997. Based on Ma Shaobo's spoken drama version, the first book is rewritten by Yang Ying and illustrated by famous Chinese artiest Wang Shuhui. There are in total

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[49] For the rise and fall of Chinese picture-story book, see Xu, Haiou. "The Rise and Fall of Picture-story Book in China." *Journal of Suzhou Institute of Silk Textile Technology*. 1999 (6): 51-54. Wei, Hua. *Research on New China Picture-story Book*. Ph.D Dissertation. Capital Normal University, China. 2006. Wei, Hua. "Research on the Decline Stage of Picture-story Book." *Journal of Foshan University* (Social Science Edition). 2007 (2:25): 29-32.

[50] Feng, Yuan. "Consultation with Fine Art Industry: Why Picture-story Book Declined?" News report. Xinhua Net. 22, July, 2004. http://big5.xinhuanet.com/gate/big5/news.xinhuanet.com/collection/2004-07/22/content_1626061.htm access on the 3rd, April, 2009.

forty-six woodcarving pictorial illustrations in this retelling. On each page, there is only one framed picture with the verbal text placed beyond the frame at the bottom of the page (See Figure 3.1.1). It has been argued, by Perry Nodelman (1988: 50), that the use of frame creates stronger detachment on the part of the viewers as it implies that what is represented in the picture is an object for the readers to look at. Also, the visual narrative in the picture-story book consistently adopts a medium long shot, giving the readers a whole picture of the people who are involved in the event. The medium long shot, according to the definition of Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996), "shows the full figure" and is often used to emphasize the relationship between characters (130). Furthermore, several of the pictorial illustrations in this retelling employ an oblique angle, which "creates greater detachment since it implies that the RP (represented participant) is 'one of them'" (Harrison, 53). That is to say, through manipulating the frame, the medium long shot, and the oblique angle, the visual narrative of the retelling tends to invite the readers/viewers to adopt an objective or a detached attitude towards the story.

The encouragement of an objective attitude towards the story is also shown in the verbal text through its use of third-person narrator. The narrator describes the legendary story of Mulan in a way more focused on what she is doing and less focused on how she feels. An emphasis on the legendary acts of the heroine and creation of a detached emotional feeling between the main character and the readers in the verbal narrative both contribute to construct Mulan as a legendary model. The retelling opens with an anti-traditional scene, in which Mulan's father is teaching his two daughters martial arts. In the illustration, Mulan and her sister, wearing traditional female dress, consisting of a feminine top and a long skirt, stand behind and watch their father performing martial arts in the foreground (See Figure 3.1.1). Viewers are placed front-on and at the same height as the face of Mulan's sister, which is tilted forward not in modesty but in observation. While the spear comes between viewer and Mulan's sister, her bow, paralleling the vector of the spear, hints that prowess is about to pass from male to female. Mulan, carrying a spear, stands diagonally behind her sister and stares thoughtfully at somewhere. The long and soft feminine dress manifests their femininity. It is possible for the viewers to get the impression that Mulan's father is practicing martial arts and his two daughters are just watching from behind because of their feminine dress. However, the verbal narrative describes that Mulan and her elder sister are learning martial arts, and that Mulan is smarter and braver than her elder sister. The visual illustration and the verbal text seem to contradict each other, but the contradiction also implies potential for a fluid gender

performance.

After Mulan cross-dresses as a man, the verbal text does not give any details about her appearance; nevertheless, the pictorial depiction represents Mulan as a character who manifests both gender features. In the picture, her face looks apparently bigger, and her shoulders and waist are much wider than before cross-dressing (See Figure 3.1.2). The bigger face, wider shoulders and waist are the features of physical masculinity. Besides masculinity, her physical femininity is also shown from her long slender eyebrows and the cherry-like mouth. The visual impact of the cross-dressing heroine, following the opening scene, also denotes the possibility of fluidity in gender performance. However, the fluidity of gender performance is not further elaborated in the retelling. Instead of giving more details about how the heroine performs different genders or manifests a fluid gender identity, the following narratives, both verbal and visual, mainly focus on what she achieves on the battlefield. It is clear that the retelling constructs Mulan as a legendary heroine without regard to her gender performance. The insignificance of gender performance is also shown in the monotonous use of salience (visual weight) in the visual illustrations.

Salience refers to visual weight of an object in the picture. According to Kress and van Leuween (1996), the varying weights of represented objects can be realized through many ways: relative size, shape, placement, color saturation, and contrast against background. Different degrees of salience provide the viewers with information to rank the importance of the objects and can hereby create a hierarchy of importance among the represented objects. Employing varying degrees of salience for the same object in different pictorial illustrations can highlight a particular feature or performance of the represented object. Therefore, manipulating salience can be an effective way to manifest the heroine's gender performance and to keep gender performance in the foreground. However, the salience of the heroine, both before and after cross-dressing, remains the same, showing that neither femininity nor masculinity of the heroine is particularly emphasized in the retelling. In fact, the employment of the same salience and the same shot is one of the features of Chinese picture-story book; therefore, it is arguable that it is very unlikely to highlight the heroine's gender performance through manipulating salience in Chinese picture-story book.

However, a retelling, which highlights the ability of the main character with scant regard for her gender identity, has potential to become a feminist text. When the retelling constructs Mulan as a gender-neutral heroine, the ending of the story hereby plays a

significant role in deciding whether the retelling is a feminist text or not. In the last scene (See Figure 3.1.3), Mulan invites Marshal He to the room where her loom is installed and tells him that her joining the war in her father's place was because the state was in danger, and that the piping times of peace have arrived so she is willing to do weaving as diligently as before and perform her duty as a woman. Mulan's will to be a diligent citizen is not a new invention in the Mulan retelling. The emphasis on the individual's function to the state is a recurrent theme in the communist retellings.[51] The significance here is that the conversation is held in the weaving room, where women perform daily female routine and where women are supposed to stay according to Confucian regulations. Also, the verbal text's third-person narration represents a controlling voice in patriarchy and therefore signifies less subjective agency for the heroine. Furthermore, the picture-story book retelling is a reworking of Ma Shaobo's opera version, which was published in the 1940s when patriotism and communism were increasing in popularity in China. A retelling of the Mulan story that aims to promote patriotic and communist concept could hardly become a feminist version because the duty of an individual is often highlighted at the cost of one's gender performance.

The second picture-story book retelling bears a certain similarity to the former particularly in regard to highlighting the achievements of the heroine. This retelling was published in 1997, immediately before China experienced the collecting craze for picture-story books. However, the aesthetic performance of the second retelling cannot be compared with the first. While the pictorial illustrations in the first retelling are delicate and exquisite, those in the second are roughly executed. As a reworking of Hau Yanxia and Wang Runsheng's chapter-styled novel, this retelling sets the historical background at the beginning of the Tang Dynasty dealing with the process about how Mulan and her comrades rescue the future emperor Li Shimin from the Turkic army.[52] Due to the emphasis on historical events in the retelling, Mulan is again, as several retellings discussed in the previous chapters, portrayed as a minor figure among many characters. She appears only at the beginning and toward the end of the story even though the retelling

[51] This has been discussed in chapter three.

[52] The second picture-story book retelling, based on Hau Yanxia and Wang Runsheng's 1994 chapter-styled novel, is written by Yi Hesheng and illustrated by Shu Zewei, Shi Jinsong, Yao Zhen, and Zong Zhao. Because the story is not really about Mulan and the storylines between the picture-story book version and the chapter-styled novel are almost the same, the chapter-styled novel is not included in the thesis. Chapter-styled novel is the major form of Chinese classical novels, in which the main themes are usually about historical events or war stories. It is designed for story-telling so each chapter has a clear topic summarising the main theme of the chapter. Often, the story-teller will end the chapter with words such as "What happened next is to be continued in the next chapter (欲知後事如何，且聽下回分解)."

is entitled *Hua Mulan Sweeps the North*.

The second retelling consists of in total 686 pictorial illustrations. Four framed pictures are placed together on one page, each with the verbal text underneath the frame (See Figure 3.2.1). Right after the opening, Mulan disguises herself as a soldier in order to test the practicability of her cross-dressing plan as manifested in the four illustrations. Visually she is presented taller and stronger than her aging father, and the verbal text describes her as a young handsome warrior. Both verbal and visual narratives represent the heroine's masculinity at the early beginning of the story, implicitly suggesting that this retelling will be a version pivoting on her heroic acts rather than on her performance of femininity. Also, in Picture Five the verbal text narrates that Mulan has learned martial arts and art of war since she was young, paving the way for her army career, and the visual illustration portrays her riding on a horse, re-emphasizing her qualification as a warrior (See Figure 3.2.1). In the pictorial illustration, she does not have delicate, feminine facial features, although this could result from the lack of artistic skills of the illustrators. Besides the masculine facial features, Mulan is presented in the picture as having wider shoulders and a big waist, once again denoting her masculine features. Although her hairstyle denotes that she is female, the clothes she puts on are gender-neutral. In reality, out of 686 illustrations this is the only picture which portrays Mulan as a female. The retelling apparently shows a disregard for the gender ambiguity of the heroine.

Not surprisingly, the picture-story book retelling ends with the convention that Mulan returns home after declining an imperial position, but what is surprising is that Mulan in the last pictorial illustration, Picture 686, is presented as a man (See Figure 3.2.2). The picture adopts a low angle of view, so that Mulan is placed above the constructed viewing position. The angle glorifies Mulan's achievement and constructs her as a heroic model. Besides the visual narrative, the verbal narrative also conforms to the representation of Mulan as a model who is loyal and, more importantly, a model who is not interested in fame and wealth. Mulan's achievements are thus summarized in a poem:

> The heroic woman Hua Mulan
> Neither rank nor wealth she desires
> With ability and wisdom she requites the country
> From generation to generation her name will be remembered
> 巾幗英杰花木蘭

不求利祿不求官
爲國報效獻才智
名標青史代代傳

Her femininity is invoked when the poem addresses her as a heroic "woman." In reality, throughout the whole retelling the heroine's femininity is recalled only through the employment of "she" in the verbal text, reflecting the insignificance of gender performance. Besides, the neglect of gender is also shown in the lack of interest in Mulan's cross-dressing secret. This is so far the only retelling that does not include any mention of her gender secret at the end of the story. Her comrades are not informed about her gender identity and neither do they appear to be interested in it. Curiously, this retelling was first published in 1997, but the mentality it reflects conforms with the erasure of gender in Maoist China, say, fifty years ago. Generally speaking, the generic features and pedagogic function of picture-story book have greatly restricted the realization of the cross-dressing Mulan to become an emancipated and agentic character.

Picture Books from Diasporic and Sinophone Regions

According to Perry Nodelman, "when most people think of books for children, they think first of *picture books*." This is because picture book is not only "the most common form of children's literature" but also "a form of storytelling almost exclusively reserved for children" (1996: 215). Quite often, children align themselves with the main characters in picture books; consequently, the ideology embedded in the story will have a great impact on the young readers' attitudes towards themselves and others in society. This is also why feminist critics tend to be critical of gender images represented in children's literature. If a picture book retelling of the Mulan story provides an alternative role model, it can inspire the young generation to construct different gender roles and also to adopt a more open-minded attitude towards different genders. Otherwise, it will once again reinforce the patriarchal ideology and the traditional stereotypes of girls and boys.

In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, it is stated that "Picture book is a rather late phenomenon in the history of children's literature." Although the earliest picture books have existed back to the middle of the seventeenth century, the development of picture books in western countries did not happen before the printing technology has been improved (248). Besides the advance in printing technology, the practice of

compulsory education and parents' increasing interest in children's literature all contribute to the development of the picture book industry in the West. Since the middle of last century, the picture book industry, particularly in the U.S. and the U. K., has been growing vigorously. In America, the immigrants and their next generations also devote themselves to the development of picture books. By so doing, they can on the one hand claim their cultural heritage and on the other hand bring multicultural features to American picture books. The diasporic picture book retellings of the Mulan story in this section are produced under such a condition.

The development of picture books in the Chinese and Sinophone regions, in comparison with that in western countries, is rather late. According to I Bin and Lin Hui-Ya, the official development of picture books in Taiwan began in 1964, when the editorial team of readers for children was formed by the government. With assistance from UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) and the guidance of American illustrators, the team launched a new stage in the picture book industry. However, the industry did not develop rapidly until twenty years ago. Now the picture book industry in Taiwan has entered a prosperous stage because of various factors, such as the improvement in economy, the change of policies, and the encouragement of domestic and overseas illustrator awards (2007: 47).

In China, the development of picture books is very recent. Picture books received little attention a decade ago, but the industry grew rapidly in the last few years. According to Fang Weiping, the recent development of picture books in China is attributable to the rapid development of the Chinese economy, the maturity of picture book publication and the printing industry, the aesthetic charm and values of picture books and that more and more people are seeking psychological support through reading pictures.[53] Even though the picture book industry in China, as Fang points out, is still in the starting period, China has striven hard to make up leeway in the last few years. With this enthusiasm and ambition, a lot of fine works have been published recently in China. *Hua Mulan*, a picture book published in 2007 for young child readers, is one of the examples.

In this section, the representations of gender and subjective agency of the cross-dressing heroine will be the pivoting points as usual. Among the seven picture books, five are published in diasporic America and two of them in the Chinese and Sinophone regions: one in Taiwan and the other in China (See Appendix 4). Based on chronological

[53] Fang, Weiping. (2006). "The Rise of Picture Book in Mainland China." Conference paper in the 2006 IBBY Congress. http://www.ibby.org/index.php?id=643 access 4th April, 2009.

order, the section will be divided into two parts: diasporic picture books and Chinese and Sinophone picture books. I will investigate in what ways the interaction of verbal text and visual illustration constructs the gender image of the heroine and further to see if femininity is allowed to be manifested on the battlefield in these latest modern Mulan retellings. In the diasporic retellings, I will also explore how each retelling uses different pictorial strategies, including layout, format, and the placement of verbal text, to affirm its origin in Chinese culture and the extent to which the diasporic texts present an alternative Chinese femininity.

Diasporic Picture Book Retellings

The five diasporic retellings are all published in the United States in the 1990s; however, it is in reality problematic to classify *The Legend of Mu Lan: A Heroine of Ancient China* as a diasporic retelling because this particular version is written and illustrated by a Chinese Singaporean and a Chinese. Neither has had a diasporic living experience in the United States. But since it is published in America, translated from Chinese into English by Eileen Hu, a Chinese American, and the target readers of the retelling are diasporic children in America, I hereby put it in the diasporic picture book section. Published by Victory Press in 1992, *The Legend of Mu Lan: A Heroine of Ancient China* is the first English-language picture book retelling and also the first diasporic version of the Mulan story for child readers.[54] The main writer/illustrator Jiang Wei, originally from China, received education in fine arts in China and Spain and is now a permanent resident in Singapore.[55] She is also the illustrator and translator of the comic book *Hua Mulan: China's Sweetest Magnolia*, which will be discussed later in the comic book section. The other writer/illustrator Jiang Cheng An, a very famous Chinese artist, has been devoting himself to the production of books for children and has so far won major illustration awards in China.

Even though *The Legend of Mu Lan* is not produced by diasporic people, the

[54] According to Sina news report, in April 1999 Victory Press sued Walt Disney Company for copyright infringement. Victory Press claimed that *The Legend of Mu Lan: A Heroine of Ancient China* was the first English text of the Mulan story in the United States and that it was also the source of the Disney animated film *Mulan* because Disney had shown a great interest in Victory Press's Mulan story in 1993 when they were looking for resources for designing an animated figure. After Disney's *Mulan* achieved outstanding box office success, Victory Press asked Disney to compensate the Chinese illustrators; however, Disney refused to do so because the animation, as they argued, was a combined story and it was not based on any particular story. See "'Mulan' Disney Suspected of Copyright Infringement." (花木蘭名花有主迪士尼涉嫌侵權) Sina.com Evening News. 29th April, 1999. http://eladies.sina.com.cn/movie/movie/1999-04-29/404.shtml access 10th April, 2009.

[55] In this retelling, the English names of both writers and illustrators appear, as they are shown on the cover of the picture book, based on Chinese convention with the last name coming first before the first name.

bilingual text and the emphasis on English text make it clear that the retelling is for diasporic child readers. In each illustration Chinese text and English text are placed together though in some cases Chinese text is placed on top of English text; however, English text is always printed in boldface, denoting the priority of English text over Chinese and the target readers of the retelling are diasporic children (See Figure 3.3.1). Diasporic texts often manifest a strong connection to their original cultures through different strategies, either verbal or pictorial, depending on what kind of genres the texts belong to. *The Legend of Mu Lan* is also oriented to its Chinese culture through both verbal and visual narratives. With the visual narrative constructing a world full of Chineseness, the verbal text clearly situates the story in the Chinese context as it begins with "[l]ong ago in a farming village in ancient China, there lived a girl named Mu Lan. She was smart and brave." This is a story explicitly about a Chinese girl whose intelligence and bravery will stand out as characteristics more important than her other capabilities. In the opening illustration, Mulan is sitting in a boat and reading a book, an unusual beginning compared to other "traditional" scenes of the Mulan story (See Figure 5.3.1). Instead of performing femininity through the usual weaving routine, Mulan is constructed as an anti-traditional girl through the act of reading. As the text emphasizes her intelligence and bravery, which are often regarded as masculine attributes, the first opening foretells the orientation of the retelling.

The orientation to the masculinity performance of the heroine is also manifested on the cover of the picture book. In *Words about Pictures*, Perry Nodelman points out that "illustrators often try to create appropriate expectations by pictures on covers or dust jackets that appear nowhere else in a book and that sum up the essential nature of the story" (48). On the cover, Mulan rides on a horse and holds a spear horizontally in her hand (See Figure 3.3.2). Femininity is faintly presented through her clean-cut face and a pair of upwardly slanting eyes. Apparently, masculinity is presented as more eye-catching than femininity through the male soldier image she shows and the powerful and masculine way she holds the spear. The essential nature of the story is hinted to be the masculine behaviour Mulan is going to perform and the masculine mission she is going to achieve. Furthermore, the narrative lays great stress on her life in the army, and little information is provided about her domestic life particularly after she returns home. Besides the emphasis on masculine attributes in the verbal text, masculinity is also strongly constructed through different pictorial strategies (See Figure 3.3.3). When Mulan is promoted to the rank of commanding general due to her achievements, the pictorial illustration presents her in a

heavy salience viewed from slightly below. As Harrison argues, if the represented participant is viewed from a low angle, she or he possesses more power over the viewers (53). The employment of a heavy salience signifies that this is an important moment in her life, denoting the masculine mission is the focus of her story. The use of low angle, together with the representation of her strong shoulders and the wide waist, constructs her as a powerful masculine figure. This is explicitly a retelling emphasizing the masculinity of the heroine. Mulan's femininity appears only in the first few openings and the last illustration when she dresses as a girl to meet her comrades. Femininity is not allowed to be shown while she is on the battlefield. The lack of the representation of femininity in the retelling suggests that a woman, if wanting to achieve a masculine mission, has to abandon subjective agency in performing as a female.

Quite different from the first picture book retelling, the second lays great stress on the heroine's femininity performance. Published in 1993, the second diasporic picture book version is retold by a Chinese American, Charlie Chin, in a lyric form, illustrated by a Japanese American, Tomie Arai, and titled *China's Bravest Girl*. The format of this retelling is square and comparatively smaller than the other picture books (See Figure 3.4.1). The friendly and small style denotes this version is for children at a younger age. *China's Bravest Girl* has both Chinese and English texts. While the verbal text is located on the left-hand side, the pictorial illustration is situated on the right hand side (See Figure 3.4.2). The English text occupies two-thirds of the page, suggesting its priority, and the Chinese text, locating in the far left-hand side, is framed with Chinese icons such as dragon and phoenix in the background. The placement of the bilingual text clearly indicates its target readership, and the traditional format gives a sense of conservativeness about Chinese culture also suggesting an expectation of a conservative view of the story. This version begins with a Pipa player telling the legendary story about Mulan to his imperial audience so the narrative is itself framed as well. The framed Chinese text and the framed narrative claim its Chinese origin and at the same time create a distance between the story and the readers. Such distance suggests that readers will adopt an objective and unemotional view of the events described in the retelling. The encouragement of an objective attitude towards the story is also suggested in the design of the cover because Mulan is literally represented as an object to be perceived.

Unsurprisingly, Mulan wears armour, riding on a horse and holding a spear in her hand on the cover. She is presented in a long shot with a medium angle, which implies the relations between the characters would be the focus of this retelling and the viewers have

equal power with the represented participants (See Figure 3.4.1). Furthermore, Mulan is unusually presented at a side-on angle, an angle creating a great detachment from the viewers because it suggests that Mulan is the object we are going to look at. Presented at a side-on angle, Mulan's whole face is hardly seen. Nevertheless, femininity implicitly stands out through the fringe of hair on her forehead. Also, the slender body under the masculine armour denotes her femininity. As the title names her China's bravest girl, femininity is also represented through the whole picture book, particularly through the visual illustrations. Appreciably different from the first retelling, the second does not emphasize the representation of masculinity; on the contrary, it emphasizes the heroine's performance of femininity.

The visual illustrations in this retelling basically construct Mulan as a female warrior rather than a cross-dressing warrior. When she is on the battlefield, her femininity is represented through her white face, pink cheeks, fringe of hair and the slender body (See Figure 3.4.3). Although the verbal text states "[f]or love of her elderly father, she will dress in warrior's clothes, walking and talking like a man, so no one ever knows," it remains clear to viewers that she is a girl. The inconsistency between the verbal text and visual illustration could highlight the climax when Mulan reveals her gender identity to her comrades. Mulan is allowed to perform her femininity while she cross-dresses as a warrior in the retelling, but the consistent representation of femininity does not attribute Mulan with subjective agency; on the contrary, it is to construct her as a traditional Confucian girl. A double-spread is employed to present the returning home scene, in which Mulan kneels down in front of her father (See Figure 3.4.4). This echoes the earlier scene when Mulan made the decision to take her father's place in the army. In the pictorial illustration, Mulan kneels down in front of her father, holds his hands and makes eye contact with him (See Figure 3.4.5). Both pictures represent her as a daughter and the concept of filial piety is explicitly performed and reinforced. In the end, Mulan tells the emperor that she desires neither wealth nor minister's post and that her duty is to her father. "My duty is to my father," as she claims, fully reflects her conservativeness and domestication by patriarchal regulations. Moreover, being a filial daughter is not enough for a Confucian girl like her. Right after revealing her secret, she accepts her comrade's proposal. Now, she has a more traditional role, the role of a wife, to perform, and her duty will be to her husband. There is no surprise that Charlie Chin ends the story with the marriage between Mulan and her comrade because the conservativeness of the story has been constructed since the very beginning of the retelling. Chin's version does not demonstrate an alternative Chinese

femininity; instead, it mediates Confucian traditional values to diasporic children through representing Mulan as a traditional Chinese girl who manifests Chinese traditional virtues. As a traditional girl, the destiny of Chin's Mulan has been decided once the story starts.

The third diasporic picture book retelling is translated and illustrated by Jeanne Lee. Published in 1995, Lee's version is non-framed, suggesting an invitation of involvement into the heroine's story. On the front cover the English title, *The Song of Mu Lang*, is stated horizontally whereas the Chinese title, 木蘭歌 (Mu Lan Ge), is written vertically with calligraphy on the back cover (See Figure 3.5.1). The placement of the bilingual titles denotes the diasporic readership of the retelling and its connection to the Chinese past, and this is the same for the bilingual texts in the illustrations. As Lan Dong observes, "the design of the text in Chinese follows the style of classical language; namely, the characters are read from top to bottom and from right to left, while the typography of English text reads from left to right, line by line according to Western usage" (225). Also, by situating the Chinese text always in the same place and altering the location of English text from illustration to illustration, "the reader is kept," as Kerry Mallan suggests, "on the alert for the [English] words as they are positioned on the ever-changing locations," which signifies the prior importance of English text over Chinese text (36). That is to say, the placement of bilingual texts and titles of the retelling assert its Chinese origin and also locate the story in Chinese American context.

Although the cover design of Lee's retelling manifests its Chinese origin and diasporic feature like most of the diasporic versions, it is unique in two senses. It is different from others not only in the way the titles are placed and written but also in the content it represents. While the other retellings usually present Mulan as a warrior, Lee's version briefly introduces Mulan's story on the cover, seeking to evoke a Chinese scroll, where a sequence of events can be depicted and Chineseness can be displayed (See Figure 3.5.1). It begins with Mulan's practicing martial arts on the far right side, followed by her cross-dressing, joining the war and defeating the enemy in the middle, and finally ending with her coming home and returning to the hill where she used to practice martial arts on the far left side. By combining different moments of the story in an open background, rather than focusing on one moment of stasis, Lee's Mulan is attributed with higher level of freedom and agency, hereby implying a feminist potential of the retelling.

Lee's retelling begins with an illustration in which a little girl is practicing martial arts with an old man on top of a mountain. Although it is not really clear who the old man is,

quite possible her father, it is clear the illustration provides information that Mulan learned martial arts when she was young (See Figure 3.5.2). The first opening portrays Mulan sitting in front of the loom and looking gloomy with worry and anxiety (See Figure 3.5.3). On the second opening, Mulan learns the emperor is raising an army and her father is in the recruiting list. Carrying the killed game from the hunt in her hand, Mulan wears female dress with bow and arrow on her back, denoting that she is probably on the way home from hunting and also that she is skilled in martial arts (See Figure 3.5.4). From the three pictorial illustrations, Mulan is represented as a girl who is equipped with weaving and hunting skills; namely, she could do both female and male tasks. While the verbal narrative constructs only Mulan's femininity, the visual narrative represents her masculine attributes. With the interaction of verbal and visual texts, gender fluidity of the heroine is therefore construed. She is a capable heroine who has both feminine and masculine attributes.

However, the emphasis on femininity is more focused in the retelling. Lee employs different degrees of salience and points of view to indicate that femininity is the prior claim of her picture book. After the heroine puts on soldier's clothes, the salience of Mulan is relatively small when compared with her putting on female clothes (See Figure 3.5.5). Through reducing the salience of the cross-dressing heroine when she is on the battlefield, the retelling not only suggests the irrelevance of gender to her achievement but also implies the insignificance of the masculine mission. Besides, the two dressing scenes also denote the priority of femininity over masculinity in the retelling. On the illustration where she cross-dresses as a man, she is presented obliquely from the viewers with a very long shot on the far left-hand side so that the viewers are constructed as detached observers (See Figure 3.5.6). The salience is very small, hereby revealing cross-dressing as a man is less significant in the story. Later when she puts on her female clothes and retrieves a female role, she is presented with her back towards the viewers, pasting a yellow flower on her hair, and looking into a mirror. The heavy salience reveals the importance of the moment and suggests the significance of performing femininity for the heroine. Different from the previous scene, the viewers now are encouraged to identify with the heroine because she is presented with back towards the viewers (See Figure 3.5.6). The employment of mirror in portrayals has a long history in Western art; however, it is less common in Chinese art. The mirror, a prime medium of self-recognition, symbolically can be used, as Angela Rosenthal suggests, to "secure the indexical veracity of sight, and therefore the [object's] 'insight'" (618). The mirror reflects the feminine image of Mulan and further secures the indexical veracity of her feminine gender identity. Furthermore, Mulan looks into the mirror with

great concentration, symbolizing that she is connecting the visual image to who she really is. Finally, the shape of the mirror, consisting of a circle and a cross, is the symbol of female, which reinforces the significance of femininity.

After the verbal text has finished narrating the story, Lee unconventionally adds one more illustration, on which Mulan is standing high on the rock of a mountain, almost back towards the viewers, and looking at the far open space (See Figure 3.5.7). This is where she learned martial arts when she was young. She goes back to the place where she first appeared, and it is somewhere in the open space. It is not home, not a confined place where a traditional woman is supposed to be. Through manipulating the illustrated strategies, Lee's retelling creates a new image of Mulan who is emancipated and agentic and further successfully modifies and transforms Confucian tradition.

The fourth diasporic retelling is retold and illustrated by Song Nan Zhang and published in 1998. Different from Lee's retelling, only the English title appears on the cover of Zhang's retelling. Like Lee's retelling, the Chinese text of Zhang's version is the copy of the original Chinese ballad; however, the Chinese text, written in calligraphy typeface, is framed and presented like Chinese Spring Festival couplets, linking the retelling to its Chinese origin. The English verbal text is the translation or Zhang's interpretation of the Chinese ballad because he makes a little addition to the content. In the layout, the English text is always located below the illustration frame at the bottom of each page. The illustration, together with the framed Chinese text, occupies four-fifths of each page (See Figure 3.6.1). The use of framed illustration and framed Chinese text creates an effect of objectivity and detachment and therefore situates the heroine's story in the past, the past where diasporic people are from. The emphasis on English again denotes this retelling is designed for diasporic children.

As mentioned earlier, the cover of the picture book usually reveals the essential nature of the story. The cover of Zhang's retelling is one of the illustrations from the picture book. Like most of the diasporic retellings, Zhang's Mulan is portrayed as a warrior, riding on a horse and holding a spear in her hand (See Figure 3.6.2). The soldier image of the heroine almost becomes a standardized cover image for the Mulan picture book retellings. In Zhang's version, Mulan is presented in a medium shot with an oblique and low angle, creating the effect that she has high self-esteem and giving the viewers the impression that she is a great and god-like figure. She has, in Chinese expression, a bear-like waist and a tiger-like back. Her strong and thick shoulders and chest, together with the huge hands, denote that this body is male; however, she has a female look. The dissolving of boundary

between femininity and masculinity makes it harder to tell the gender of the warrior. It could be a female warrior who has strong and fully-developed muscles, or a male warrior who has a delicate and good-looking face. The fluidity and ambiguity of gender identities on the cover is consistently performed during Mulan's cross-dressing years as depicted in the illustrations.

In the retelling, the salience of Mulan when she is portrayed as a warrior is relatively small so it is usually difficult to tell her gender features (See Figure 3.6.1). Among those army illustrations, the one from which the cover draws employs the heaviest salience. The illustration presents the androgynous Mulan in the front and has a battle scene and a snowy landscape in the background (See Figure 3.6.3). Both battle scene and snowy landscape present the difficulty and hardship Mulan has suffered on the battlefield and hence reinforce the legendary effect of her story. The ambiguity of her gender identity implies that her achievements on the battlefield are irrespective of her gender. However, on the same illustration Mulan's whole body is surrounded with white light which creates an effect of divinity and a sense of unreality. The godlike effect and the sense of unreality to some extent ironically suggest the fictionality and impracticability of Mulan's cross-dressing act. Zhang's retelling ends, according to the original ballad, with two hares running side by side, which could signify the equality between woman and man or the coming of marriage of a couple. The ambiguity or fluidity of gender performance, as the ambiguity of the ending, symbolizes at the same time the female subjective agency and the patriarchal confinement for women.

The last diasporic retelling is written by the American award-winning author of fiction for children, Robert D. San Souci. *Fa Mulan* is one of the sources of Disney's animated film although it is published after the release of the film. The illustrators, Jean and Mou-Sien Tseng employ a classical Chinese art form, the scroll, to design the book. On the opening illustration, the string is untied and the scroll is unrolled, strongly suggesting a Chinese story/art will soon be displayed in front of the reader's eyes (See Figure 3.7.1). The title, along with the names of author and illustrators, is written in Chinese in calligraphy typeface on the beautiful piece of fabric located on the far right side of the illustration. The English title, English names of the author and the illustrators, together with the images of cloud and cranes, appear in the middle of the laid-out scroll, positioning the story within Chinese American context and also denoting the priority of English in the retelling. Furthermore, the illustration is framed on the top and the bottom edges with embroidered fabric, creating an effect like the scroll being unrolled. When the readers turn

to next page, the story, presented with the pictorial illustration and the English text, is displayed in front of the readers.[56] The string is tied on the last illustration of the retelling, symbolizing the end of the story (See Figure 3.7.2). The Chinese art format and the English text together build San Souci's retelling a connection with Chinese and American cultures.

On the cover of San Souci's retelling, Mulan again puts on armour and rides on a horse with a spear in her hand. She is presented in a medium shot with an oblique and low angle, which creates a sense of detachment for the viewers and places her as someone who has high social status and self-esteem. Masculinity is manifested because she is presented as a warrior who has a male look and who has a thick and powerful back and shoulders. The masculine strength in her cross-dressing years is repetitively performed in the visual narrative although the verbal narrative attributes her achievements on the battlefield to her balance between femininity and masculinity. As the verbal narrative describes in the middle of the retelling, "'[y]ou excel because you balance female and male energies,' one veteran told her. 'A good swordsman should appear as calm as a fine lady, but he must be capable of quick action like a surprised tiger.'" The importance of balancing femininity and masculinity is also reinforced when she outlines a plan for the battle with other generals in the tent. The illustration is split into two parts with a diagonal strip. She is placed on the upper left-hand side and the battle scene is presented on the lower half side of the illustration (See Figure 3.7.3). The employment of the frame-breaking signifies this is a crucial moment in her life and situates her as a leader and male general, who is good at both fighting and planning the battles. While the visual narrative manifests her masculinity, the verbal text once again reinforces the idea that the key to the success is to combine femininity with masculinity. Mulan's battle plan is "[a]ct like a shy maiden to make the enemy think you are no threat. Then surprise them like a hare just let loose, and catch them off guard." Although the verbal text here suggests that neither femininity nor masculinity is dispensable if Mulan is to perform as a great warrior, the visual narrative literally portrays Mulan as a male warrior in her cross-dressing journey, implying the essentiality of masculinity.

The propensity to masculinity during Mulan's army life, based on the finding from the previous Mulan retellings, will be likely to lead a conservative ending because gender construction is stereotypical. If performing masculinity is necessary while she ventures into

[56] San Souci's picture book is written only in English, and its target readership may include both diasporic and white child readers in the United States. Because it has a strong connection with Chineseness, I classify the retelling in the category of diasporic picture books of the Mulan story.

male territory, Mulan will be prone to perform a traditional female role after she returns home. With San Souci's modifications, Mulan at the end returns to a "destined" role, a role which is acceptable in patriarchal society and a role which conforms to the image of Chinese girls in westerner's eyes. San Souci constructs Mulan as a tomboy who dreams of being a great warrior at the beginning; however, when she fulfils her masculine dream on the battlefield, she starts thinking about another dream—becoming someone's bride.

> Mulan missed her family. She kept apart from the soldiers of her squad, her "fire companions," because of her secret. But sometimes one or another of the brave, handsome young men would touch her heart. She would dream of leaving the battlefield for the fields of home, of becoming a bride, a wife, a mother. However, duty to family and country, and her sense of honor, pushed all these dreams aside.
>
> The ninth opening, *Fa Mulan*

Mulan's dream of becoming a bride, a wife, and a mother strongly hints at the conservative ending of San Souci's retelling.

> At last Mulan stepped into the room where her fire companions and family waited. Her comrades were amazed and confused. "Our general is a woman!" cried one. Smiling, Mulan said, "When the male rabbit bounds across the meadow, and the female runs beside him, no one can tell which is which. So it is when soldiers fight side by side." The companion who had spoken—the one Mulan felt closest to—returned her smile, saying, "In the field, what is the need of telling he-rabbit from she-rabbit? But when they return to their burrow, the rabbits know which partner is husband and which is wife. So they build a life together." To Mulan, his words hinted at a bright, shared tomorrow.
>
> The last illustration, *Fa Mulan*

His words hint not only a bright and shared tomorrow but also the realization of Mulan's dream, a dream of being a traditional woman after she has accomplished many

anti-traditional achievements. Furthermore, the illustrations depicting Mulan's cross-dressing life all have soft focus backgrounds and are painted in low modality (See Figure 3.7.4). As John Stephens points out, "[n]ormal modality (realism) shapes and determines procedures for interpretation, and hence acts of interpretation performed in response to lower modality representation become subordinated to the higher modality. Where there are parallel semiotic systems, the higher in modality will tend to dominate the lower" (2000, 47). The soft focus background creates a dream-like effect in contrast to the more realistic illustrations when Mulan performs her femininity. The contrast indicates women could achieve agency only by crossing gender, but gender-crossing is just a dream and it is unrealistic. By ending the story with a strong hint of romance or marriage between Mulan and her comrade, San Souci's retelling is unable to escape the Confucian metanarrative of the Mulan story; on the contrary, it once again reinforces the patriarchal idea that the dream of women is to be wives and the essential place for them is home.

Overall, each of the diasporic picture books attributes Mulan with different degrees of subjective agency through manipulating the two narratives in various ways. Jiang Wei and Jiang Cheng An's retelling tends to emphasize the masculine performance of the heroine, so does San Souci's retelling. The focus on masculinity performance of the heroine suggests femininity is not allowed to be manifested in male's territory, and hereby suggests the stereotypical gender image still dominates the retelling and in consequence implies the low level of subjective agency of the cross-dressing heroine. Chin's retelling, although allowing the manifestation of femininity on the battlefield, closes the story with a conservative closure, the wedding of the heroine and her comrade. Zhang's retelling, in comparison, provides a possibility of gender fluidity for the heroine; however, it does not really bring the emancipation of women to light due to the ambiguous ending. Lee, ingeniously manipulating the two narratives, provides an alternative Chinese femininity of the Chinese heroine which will bridge over the otherness and familiarities for diasporic children and at the same time play a positive role in their construction of gender and cultural identities. Also, Lee's Mulan not only challenges the two polarized gender roles but also manifests a different choice/image of woman. Lee's retelling proves the assumption that texts for children are usually slow in responding to contemporary feminist thinking is somewhat untrue.

Chinese and Sinophone Picture Book Retellings

The following two picture books are the recent Mulan retellings published for child readers

in Chinese and Sinophone regions; however, the one published in Taiwan in 2003 cannot be really qualified as a picture book. As indicated by the title of the book, *Classical Stories on Loyalty and Filial Piety* (經典忠孝故事), it is a collection of stories about filial children and loyal subordinates, and the Mulan retelling is only one of them. But because the story is retold with pictorial illustrations, it is classified as a picture book here for the convenience of analysis. The second retelling, *Hua Mulan*, was published in China in 2007. It manifests the dramatic improvement in producing picture books in China as it employs various pictorial strategies, which help to bring vividness into the picture book. In this section, I will explore how the two retellings construct Mulan's gender and consider whether, as the latest Mulan retellings, they can transform the Confucian metanarrative into a feminist story. I will also look at the similarities and differences between diasporic and Sinophone retellings in terms of the construction of gender and cultures.

Compared to the other picture book retellings, the Taiwanese version is apparently designed for children at a much younger age. Besides its smaller size shape, the representations of visual and verbal texts also denote that it is for younger readers. On the rather small cover Mulan is not presented; instead, the photo of Su Wu (蘇武), a famous loyal subordinate in the Han Dynasty is presented (See Figure 3.8.1). In the story collection, all of the stories are written in traditional Chinese characters with phonetic alphabet at the right side of each word, manifesting the pedagogic function for the younger readers. While the verbal text is always located on the top on a white background, the pictorial illustration occupies two-thirds of the page. Although the pictorial illustration is not framed, the white background of the verbal text creates an impression that the illustration is half-framed (See Figure 3.8.2). Separating the verbal text from the pictorial illustration is often used in traditional picture books particularly for younger readers because it can highlight the literacy function of the books. Also, the characters presented in the pictures reflect a fashion for cuteness in recent illustration and in manga, as they are portrayed with big heads and big eyes (See Figure 3.8.2). For example, on the illustrations the head of Mulan usually occupies one-half of her whole body, creating a strong effect of cuteness. Curiously, similar to Charlie Chin's retelling, which is also designed for younger readers, the retelling also represents Mulan as a female warrior rather than a cross-dressing warrior on the battlefield.

More astonishingly, the Taiwanese picture book retelling even portrays Mulan as a female when she heads for the battlefield. Contrary to the other Mulan stories, in which

Mulan usually leaves home disguising as a male soldier, the Taiwanese retelling represents her as a young female child who seems to leave home for a short trip (See Figure 3.8.2). In the illustration Mulan wears female clothes although leaving home on horseback. Although she does not look well-prepared in the illustration, the verbal text gives the information that she has everything she needs with her. Her careless look denotes her full assurance of accomplishing the task, thereby degrading the value and importance of the masculine task and also suggesting the equality between female and male. As mentioned earlier, the retelling literally represents Mulan as a female warrior (See Figure 3.8.3). Mulan's fringe and hair on the temples explicitly manifest her femininity. Performing femininity on the battlefield, if it is not for constructing her as a traditional heroine at the end of the story like that in Charlie Chin's retelling, could hold significant meaning in the emancipation of women. If femininity is allowed to be performed on the battlefield, there will be no need for women to hide their gender identity when they enter a traditionally male field, which symbolizes the possibilities of equality between genders and also suggests the modification and transformation of Confucian culture.

The emphasis on femininity is also shown in the scene when she resumes the female role after returning home (See Figure 3.8.4). In the illustration Mulan is presented facing the mirror but obliquely to the viewers. Although the oblique angle suggests that she is presented as an object to be perceived rather than a character who invites the viewers' identification, the salience employed here is the heaviest in the whole retelling, once again defining femininity as the essential feature of the heroine. Furthermore, the retelling does not end with the typical hare scene, which may lead to an ambiguous interpretation and also imply a traditional return to a patriarchal society. Instead, the last illustration portrays the astonishment of Mulan's comrades when she reveals her gender identity outdoors. The astonished response reflects their assurance and admiration for her achievement and capability. The outdoor place, though it does not guarantee a very high level of subjective agency like the open space in Lee's diasporic retelling, does attribute the little heroine with a high degree of agency. Overall, the Taiwanese picture book retelling to some extent manifests a feminist version of the Mulan story through the emphasis on the representation of femininity and the ending which assures the young readers of the heroine's capability without casting her as a traditional female character.

The second picture book retelling, *Hua Mulan*, from China, also manifests the possibility of transforming the conservative Confucian metanarrative of the Mulan story into a feminist text; what is more, it can also serve as a good example of how China has

made tremendous progress in producing picture books in the twenty-first century. Coincidentally, the target readers of the Chinese picture book retelling are also rather young. Although it says on the cover that this picture book is classified as a book for babies (寶寶書), its target readers are a bit older than those of the Taiwanese retelling due to the higher modality of the illustrations. In China and Taiwan, *The Ballad of Mulan* is usually included in school text books for junior high school students. What implications could the Mulan retellings have for much younger child readers? In practice, because of the young target audience, the absence of detailed battle scenes, which are essential in a masculine text, can to some extent help the Mulan text transform into a story that emphasises femininity.

That the Chinese picture book targets a young audience is also indicated by its format and layout. The size of the picture book is square and small, clearly manifesting its young readership. Also, the verbal text is written in simplified Chinese characters with romanization phonetics (pinyin) on top of each Chinese character, denoting the literacy function of the book for young readers (See Figure 3.9.1). The format and layout adopted in the retelling seem to be traditional; however, the designs of cover and the title page promise a different story. First of all, Mulan is presented as a female on the cover though a much smaller cross-dressing Mulan appears in the top right hand corner (See Figure 3.9.2). Unlike most of the Mulan picture book retellings, which tend to present a masculine Mulan on the book covers, the Chinese retelling represents the female Mulan, fully manifesting her femininity and orienting the direction of the retelling. Second, besides the title and the publishing information, a hair pin and a helmet are presented on the title page (See Figure 3.9.3). The co-presentation of the female hair pin and the male helmet symbolizes the cross-dressing heroine has both feminine and masculine attributes and also suggests the dissolution of gender distinctions in the retelling. Although dissolving gender boundaries in the Mulan text is not really a good way to construct an emancipated and agentic heroine, it can, however, present the achievements of the heroine in relation to her capability rather than her gender identity. Therefore, it is arguable that the designs of the cover and the title page already foretell the anti-traditional propensity of the retelling.

As the cover exhibits the importance of femininity, the Chinese picture book also lays great stress on the visual representation of the heroine's femininity particularly through the employment of different salience. The salience of Mulan on the domestic scenes, or when she puts on female clothes, is apparently heavier than that on the

battlefield scenes when she is disguised as a male warrior (Compare Figure 3.9.1 with Figure 3.9.4). Similar to Lee's diasporic retelling, the Chinese picture book retelling adopts the use of heavy salience in presenting femininity, indicating the priority of femininity over masculinity in the whole retelling. In contrast, the less significant masculinity has been represented through the verbal description.

> Life in the army was very arduous. They ate iron rations when they were hungry. If tired, they slept in the wilderness. Like the men, Mulan marched and fought. She never complained about the hardship. No one knew that the gallant soldier was a girl.
> 軍隊的生活非常艱苦，餓了啃啃乾糧，累了就睡在野地裡。木蘭和男人一樣行軍作戰，從不叫苦，誰也沒有發現這個英勇的士兵是個女孩子。
> Hua Mulan p.8

While the verbal text constructs Mulan as a heroine with masculine attributes, the visual text represents Mulan as more like a gender-neutral heroine. In the illustration Mulan is portrayed as a male soldier with a pretty female face. Her slender and long eyebrows, together with a pair of upwardly slanting eyes, implicitly manifest her femininity. As argued earlier, the portrayal of a gender-neutral heroine not only plays down the importance of gender but also attributes her achievements to her effort and capability.

Although femininity is not particularly reinforced during Mulan's army life, the Chinese retelling concludes the importance of femininity at the end with a double-spread illustration, in which Mulan appears dressed as a female in the foreground and her comrades stare from the background, mouths wide open (See Figure 3.9.5). The feminine look, make-up and dress fully manifest Mulan's feminine features. Emphasizing the heroine's gender identity as female at the end of the Mulan text can symbolize a higher level of female subjective agency. Overall, the hint of the priority of femininity on the cover conforms to that in the end of the retelling. Although the subjective agency Mulan obtains in the retelling cannot compete with that in Lee's diasporic retelling, a femininity-emphasizing text does guarantee a high level of subjective agency for the heroine and can thereby provide a model for the young readers to develop their gender identities.

The launch of the 2007 picture book retelling in China has several significant

meanings. Firstly, the delicate design of the book, including the employment of different salience, angles, and points of view, marks a substantial progress in producing picture books in China in recent years. Secondly, the femininity-emphasizing text to some extent helps transform the Confucian text of the Mulan story towards a feminist text and further imparts a positive attitude for young children, particularly female children, for their construction of gender identity. And more importantly, the Chinese retelling not only reflects contemporary feminist thinking but also reconstructs an alternative Mulan story appreciably different from the patriotic retellings of the previous century because the social function of the individual is no longer paramount and the performance of femininity is now allowed.

The two picture book retellings from Chinese and Sinophone regions, in comparison with diasporic picture book retellings, reveal some interesting points. While the diasporic retellings carefully construct Chineseness, the Sinophone versions provide little description of the cultural grounding. Presenting Chineseness is essential in the diasporic retelling because it connects diasporic people to their root and past and it contributes to the development of cultural identities for diasporic children. Also, most of the diasporic retellings are more timid in providing a feminist version of the Mulan story than the two Chinese and Sinophone retellings. Often, texts produced for children in the West are under pressure from feminist criticism to make "a conscious effort to present more balanced images" in their gender representations (Louie, 143); consequently, they might have higher potential to construct an alternative Mulan story. However, due to their insistence on presenting authentic Confucian tradition and culture, the diasporic retellings confine themselves from becoming feminist texts and therefore fail to give a different female role model for child readers in the modern times. The two Chinese and Sinophone retellings interestingly exhibit the feminist potential of the Mulan story; both of them present the heroine's success in relation to her capability rather than to her gender identity. Furthermore, due to the consciousness of target audience both retellings show a distinct lack of details in presenting battle scenes, a fundamental component in constructing the masculine features and attributes of Mulan. The heroine's performance of masculinity is thus de-emphasized, with the result that the text constructs a gender-neutral or a more feminine heroine. As argued earlier, if the retelling can manage femininity properly, say, not to construct it as traditional femininity, it is possible to retell a feminist version of the Mulan story even though the story is in nature Confucian.

A Comic Book Retelling from the Sinophone Region for English-speaking Readers

Hua Mulan: China's Sweetest Magnolia, published in Singapore in 1996, is the only comic book version of the Mulan story in my selection. It is edited and illustrated by a Chinese and a Chinese Singaporean. The Chinese Singaporean illustrator Jiang Wei is also the writer of the diasporic picture book retelling *The Legend of Mu Lan: A Heroine of Ancient China*, published in 1992 in America. The 1996 retelling employs various pictorial strategies, reflecting the features of comics, to represent, for example, a series of movements or the emotional feeling of characters. It is exquisitely designed, but the reading directions of the illustrations are somewhat not consistent. Since the comic adopts the western style, the reading direction is presumed to be left-to-right. However, in some pages the reading direction changes to right-to-left, and this leads to confusion and misunderstanding. For example, when the newly-recruited soldiers are asked to compete in martial arts, Mulan's comrade falls down on the ground before she defeats him (See Figure 3.10.1). The reading order suddenly changes from the previous left-to-right to right-to-left here. The illustrators seem to hybridize two systems, mixing western layout with Japanese manga layout: the language reading path in English text is left-to-right whereas the manga reading path is right-to-left.

As the readership of the retellings often has great influence on the representation of gender images, it is necessary to begin with the target readership of the comic book retelling. On the cover, the title is written in English and Chinese; however, the main text is written in English only. The Chinese title denotes the connection between the story and its cultural background while the English title and English text manifest its main readership.[57] Therefore, the target readers should be English-speaking readers, including diasporic readers, in Singapore and the rest of the world. Due to the various generic conventions, different genres adopt different strategies to present a diasporic background. Different from picture books, in which format and design can also be used to present the cultural heritage of stories, comic books represent cultural background usually through the content of the story and the illustrations such as the clothes characters wear or the sketches of buildings if there are any. In this comic book retelling, the clothes Mulan puts on not only reflect her cultural background but also have a strong connection with her gender performance.

The comic book retelling begins with the birth of the young Mulan, who showed her

[57] According to the publishing information of *Hua Mulan: China's Sweetest Magnolia*, the retelling is translated from Chinese into English by Wang Jian. It is not clear if the Chinese version has been published or not because no publishing record has been found. However, it is noteworthy that it is quite unlikely for a comic book retelling to be bilingual as there won't be enough space for two languages in word balloons.

masculine talents from an early age. She learned to read and write at five and began to practise martial arts at the age of ten. She also learned the art of war and was very engaged in deploying troops by using small stones. According to the verbal text, she soon became a "king of kids" in her village and "often acted as general and deployed a group of kids in battle formation" (10). She manifested her masculine traits in childhood so that her father considered her as a high-minded girl and her mother thought that "[t]his girl should have been a boy" (9). Quite unusually, Mulan learned all these masculine-related tasks before she learned to perform feminine tasks. In the comic book, she learns to do housework at the age of seventeen, a marriageable age. Similar to several Mulan predecessors, the comic book Mulan has literally been raised up as a boy by her parents. Although the verbal text suggests that Mulan's masculinity is inborn, the masculine attributes she possesses are actually acquired through the training she receives. The beginning of the comic book retelling seems to repeat one of the patriarchal formulas in the Confucian metanarrative of the Mulan story: only a masculine heroine can achieve the mission in a cross-dressing story. By adopting a traditional beginning, the comic book seems to foretell that it is unlikely to be a feminist retelling because the early gender representation of the heroine does not demonstrate the potential to destablize the normative gender categories.

However, Mulan's masculinity suddenly disappears when she reaches puberty or when she puts on feminine clothes (See Figure 3.10.2). On page ten, her heroic bearing was shown in her riding posture and her leading role among the male children. Once she puts on female clothes and wears a feminine hairstyle, her body language changes (11). Femininity is represented not only in her clothes and hairstyle but also from her stance. The light feminine clothes, together with the womanly posture, make her graceful and supple. And now, Mulan's mother perceives her as "a good girl" and "[o]ne in a billion" (11). The shift of mother's comments on Mulan reflects the changes in gender representation of the heroine in the retelling. By presenting a heroine who is masculine in childhood but a very feminine teenager, the text manifests the performative nature of gender and also denotes the heroine's potential for gender fluidity.

The feminist potential, however, is not given full play in the comic book because the text aims to promote the moral virtues and achievements Mulan performs. Not surprisingly, both verbal and visual narratives construct the soldier Mulan as a masculine warrior who completely hides her femininity under the male disguise. She repeatedly fights and wins on the battlefield. She is not only good at martial skills but also the bravest of the brave. When she is wounded in the arm, she claims that the arrow wound is nothing to her (85). She is

also a “man” of dignity. When she is aware that the daughter of a wineshop proprietor seems to be falling in love with her, she stops visiting the shop. Being admired by other female characters is not a new invention in the Mulan retellings, as such admiration is often used to prove how successful Mulan’s cross-dressing performance is. Besides the verbal narrative, the visual narrative also employs pictorial strategies to present Mulan’s masculinity. After putting on male armour, Mulan looks different from her female self (See Figure 3.10.3). Her face looks rounder, her shoulders become thicker, her waist apparently grows bigger, and the pair of slender eyebrows now become dashing. Under the visual effect, the male Mulan is represented taller and stronger than the female Mulan. Besides, her gestures in the army are sometimes presented as even more manly than the other soldiers (See Figure 3.10.4 and Figure 3.10.5). The way she holds a spear and the way she stands manifest a strong sense of masculinity. Through the interaction of both verbal and visual narratives, the extreme masculinity of the soldier Mulan is constructed; by so doing, the text seems to imply that there is no space for gender fluidity.

At the end of the comic book, Mulan returns home and plays the feminine role assigned by the patriarchal society without difficulty. When she once again puts on her female clothes, femininity all at once comes back to her. Her feminine performance is very natural as if she has never performed masculinity before. Clothes again function as the social regulation of gender behaviours. As Mulan claims, “[w]ith this skirt on and walking graceful steps, I can restore myself as a woman” (109). Putting on female clothes, her gestures consequently become feminine. She then happily weaves and cooks a meal for her family as the illustration shows. Through dressing as a female and performing a traditional female daily routine, she restores female identity. Returning to a traditional role defined by patriarchy signifies the lack of subjective agency for the heroine. Later when the Marshal visits Mulan, she expresses her will to go back to the battlefield once the borders are not safe, which suggests that she has a higher level of agency than those who also stay home but choose marriage at the end of the retellings. However, the representations of extreme gender performances not only signify that gender-fluidity is not allowed but also strengthen the stereotypical images of the two genders.

Conclusion

Picture story book, picture book, and comic book are genres which systematically combine words and images. With various manipulations of verbal and visual codes, the retellings could be reconstructed in drastically different ways; therefore, the representations of the

heroine could be quite different in the word-and-image retellings. Generally, the representations of gender in the word-and-image retellings discussed above can be classified into five categories in terms of gender performance: emphasis on masculinity; neglect of gender; emphasis on femininity; ambiguous gender performance; and feminist retellings. The first category is the retellings emphasizing the masculine performance of the heroine. Most of the word-and-image retellings belong to this category because it is traditionally and still widely believed that a cross-dressing heroine like Mulan must be masculine. Usually, the retellings of this category tend to highlight the legendary aspect of the heroine or to reinforce her duty to her society. However, masculinising the heroine, as argued before, is not a good way to represent gender equality as it implies that only through performing like men can women achieve at a comparable level. The second category, represented by the Chinese picture-story book retelling *Mulan Sweeps the North*, reconstructs the heroine in a similar way as the first category. Although it represents Mulan as a masculine heroine, gender performance is literally ignored in the retelling. It is the first version in which Mulan's cross-dressing secret is never been revealed. To be more precise, her secret disguise as a man is totally forgotten at the end of the story. Although the masculine image of the heroine is not new, the ignorance of gender performance of the heroine is unprecedented. The unimportance of gender performance denotes the concept that one's gender is not essential regarding one's service to the state. When gender is erased, it is impossible for the heroine to be emancipated.

The third category is the retelling emphasizing the representation of femininity, especially in traditional form. Charlie Chin's picture book retelling is a prime example in this category. As a diasporic text, Chin's retelling, reconstructing the heroine as a female warrior rather than a cross-dressing warrior, has a great potential to demonstrate alternative Chinese femininity and further to transform Confucian traditions; nevertheless, the feminine performance of the heroine on the battlefield in his retelling paves the way for the heroine to retrieve a traditional role, a wife, at the end of the story. Although the heroine's returning home to some degree symbolizes her return to patriarchy, the degree to which the heroine is attributed with subjective agency can be manipulated differently. If manipulated with great sophistication, Mulan can still become emancipated and obtain a certain level of subjective agency. Otherwise, if the retelling represents marriage as the destiny and the ending of the heroine, it will once again become a romance retelling, which cannot provide any alternative gender role models for young generations. The purpose of the retelling is to broadcast traditional Confucian values and teach children to behave "properly."

The fourth category tends to close the story with an ambiguous ending as that in the original ballad. The retellings with an ambiguous ending are usually based on the ballad so it is not uncommon to see this category of retellings in other genres of the Mulan story. However, Zhang's diasporic picture book retelling is the only version belonging to the category among the word-and-image retellings discussed in this chapter. As the story ends with the famous hare scene, symbolizing both the coming of marriage and the possibility of gender equality, it is ambiguous if the heroine is emancipated or not. Even though it is not clear to what extent the heroine in this category obtains subjective agency, there is no doubt that the degree to which she is attributed with agency is higher than those of the previous three categories because of at least two points: first, the achievements of the heroine are portrayed irrespective of her gender; second, the ending of her story does not really construct her as a traditional female.

The last category, including Lee's diasporic retelling and two retellings from Chinese and Sinophone regions for younger child readers, presents a feminist retelling of the Mulan story. Each of the three retellings employs different strategies to construct Mulan's femininity, and all of them manifest a feminist potential in the Mulan story. Lee's retelling, through a sophisticated manipulation of verbal and visual narratives, constructs an unprecedented Mulan heroine who not only successfully escapes the Confucian metanarrative of the Mulan story but also provides an alternative role model for diasporic children to develop their cultural and gender identities. It is the most successful Mulan retelling so far in terms of gender construction. The other two retellings, targeting young child readers, also exhibit a high potential to reconstruct an alternative gender image of Mulan; the restriction on presenting details in the battle scene becomes a turning point to manifest the heroine's femininity and her capability. Furthermore, the two retellings manipulate the ending in a way which promises the heroine higher liberty and freedom and therefore successfully transform the conservative Mulan story into a feminist story. The three retellings are a pleasant surprise because it is the first time that the retellings effectively escape the Confucian metanarrative that informs the Mulan story and, more importantly, they are retold in texts for children. As it has been argued many times that gender representation in children's texts may strongly influence children in developing their own gender roles in society, a feminist version of the Mulan story can not only provide an alternative female role model for young girls but also encourage the young child reader to adopt a more gender equal attitude in everyday society.

Chapter Five

Americanizing and Globalizing Mulan: Disney Animation and Other Animated Cartoon Versions

Introduction

Following the previous discussion, this chapter will also deal with the Mulan retellings for children, not in the dual semiotic system form of verbal and visual narratives, but in the multi-modal system form: animation and cartoon. Since the middle of last century, the Mulan story has been duplicated in the word-and-image combined form, mostly in the form of picture book; however, towards the end of the twentieth century the Mulan story was also produced in the form of animated film. Although young compared to other forms of narrative for children, animated film, has become a highly developed form because of the emergence of advanced technology, and it is now "the primary way in which youth learn about themselves, their relationship to others, and the large world" (Giroux, 2). Hence, its representation of gender and cultures, other cultures in particular, has significant influence on children in terms of how they construct their subjectivity and how they deal with others in the world.

The discussion in this chapter will encompass two Disney animated films and four animated cartoons produced by smaller entertainment companies. The six retellings are all produced in English-speaking countries between 1997 and 2009: five from America and one as cooperation between America and Australia (Appendix Five). No Mulan retellings in animated form have been produced in China and Sinophone regions.[58] This is partly because the development of animated films in Japan and America is much earlier and more advanced than countries in Chinese and Sinophone regions. Also, the animations produced in Chinese and Sinophone regions haven't stood high in customers' favour although the animated film industry in the regions has devoted itself to the production of animated films for children over the last two decades. Furthermore, the entertainment conglomerates such as Disney and Miyasaki Hayao have dominated the world market, which in consequence makes it harder for the smaller entertainment companies to survive. Hence, it is not too surprising that no Mulan retelling in animated form is found from China and Sinophone regions.

As mentioned in the Introduction, Mulan has become the most well-known Chinese

[58] Perhaps the closest is the animation of the picture book by Song Nan Zhang. Zhang's diasporic animation is very short and is included in the discussion in this chapter.

woman warrior since Disney appropriated the story in 1998. Disney's *Mulan* is the first Mulan retelling which has successfully entered the households of thousands of families in the world. Following its success, Disney released the DVD sequel, *Mulan II* at the beginning of 2005. Focusing on the freedom of women, the DVD invents a further adventure for Mulan and pivots on the custom of arranged marriage referred to early in the previous animation *Mulan*. Disney's animation has gained far-flung fame, but was not the first *Mulan* film launched in the market. In 1997, one year before the release of Disney's *Mulan*, UAV Corporation,[59] a small local entertainment company located in South Carolina, launched *The Secret of Mulan*. It is an anthropomorphic version of the Mulan retelling, in which the heroine is portrayed as a caterpillar leading a caterpillar-and-butterfly army to fight against beetles and wasps. The fourth Mulan retelling in the multi-modal form is the animation of the diasporic picture book by Song Nan Zhang; it is also published by Pan Asian Publications, but the DVD was released a decade after the launch of the picture book retelling. The next animated cartoon, also named *Mulan*, was produced by Australian Burbank Entertainment,[60] commissioned by American Anchor Bay Entertainment[61] in 1998. The last retelling, produced by Springboard Video, was first released in 1999.[62] Among the six retellings, only Song Nan Zhang's version is reproduced by people who have Chinese cultural backgrounds; the other five retellings, although they might have consulted Chinese people or conducted research in China, all to different degrees represent China and the story of the Chinese heroine according to a western cultural imaginary about the Orient.

Emphasizing the changes the films make, the study will examine how China and the Chinese heroine are represented in the newest form of narrative for children—animation. Can Mulan possess a comparably high level of subjective agency in the animated retellings as she does in some of the picture book retellings? Based on different types of feature films, the following discussion will further be divided into two sections: animation and cartoon.

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[59] UAV Corporation was purchased by Morgenthaler Partners in 2002, and its main products include VHS, DVD videos of movies, cartoon and TV shows. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UAV_Corp. access 15 July, 2009.

[60] Burbank Entertainment is an Australian entertainment company, which produces entertainment animated films for children. http://www.burbankanimation.com/profile.html access 13 May 2010

[61] Anchor Bay Entertainment is a U.S. based home entertainment company and is a division of Starz Media. Its products include features films, series, television specials and short films. http://wapedia.mob/en/Anchor_Bay_Entertainment access 15 July 2009. Mulan was part of a series of 50 minute telemovies, most of which were versions of Disney animations, such as *Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *The Little Mermaid.*

[62] Springboard Video is Evolve Media Corp's video division, offering video publishing technology solution and advertising solution for customers. access 13 September 2010. The Springboard *Mulan* DVD was re-released by Digital Versatile Disc Limited in 2008.

Furthermore, because Disney's animated film *Mulan* has almost become the most representative Mulan retelling in the world and numerous subsequent Mulan retellings afterwards are explicitly influenced by Disney's adaptation, the analysis will therefore begin with Disney's animated films.

Cultural Transformation: An Americanized Chinese Woman Warrior in Disney's *Mulan* and *Mulan II*

Apart from the original story, *The Ballad of Mulan*, Disney's animated adaptation probably is the Mulan retelling which receives most attention from critics. While some critics praise the gender construction of the action-taking heroine, others are more interested in the representation of cultures, both Chinese and American, in the film. According to the Walt Disney Company, they had done a great amount of research in China before producing the animation in order to make the adaptation as authentic as possible;[63] however, it is clear that the animation has made some substantial changes. It is due to the changes that Disney's adaptation fails to present an authentic Chinese story, and it is through the changes that the Chinese heroine, who once performed gender based on Confucian regulations, has gradually been transformed into an American teenage girl, who now performs gender according to American standards. Although the image of Disney's Mulan may seem quite different from the other Disney princesses, the representation of gender in *Mulan* is in reality in tune with that in the other animated films. In order to explore how Mulan has been Americanized and how her gender construction is consistent with Disney's construction of female images, it is helpful to look at the central doctrine of the Disney princess collections, family value, before embarking on the analysis of *Mulan*.

Gender construction and family values in Disney's film productions

Before 1990 family value in Disney's feature films is often shown by presenting a female protagonist as a mother and wife whereas family value in the films after 1990 is demonstrated through the intimate relationship between parent and child, father and daughter in particular. In the early fairy-tale feature films such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), the three female protagonists, under the modification of Disney, are constructed as a mother/wife figure, a preferable female role in a patriarchal society. Take *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* as

[63] For further details, see Kurtti, Jeff. *The Art of Mulan*. New York: Hyperion, 1998.

an example. Maria Tatar observes that the seven dwarfs are "models of neatness" and are "hardly in need of a housekeeper" in the Brothers Grimm's *Snow White*, the pretext of Disney's version (233). However, following Snow White when she enters the dwarf's cottage, we see a quite different scene in Disney's film: the sink is piled with cups and plates, dirty clothes are hung over chairs, and everything is covered with dust. "Maybe they have no mother," immediately Snow White exclaims and then suggests "we will clean the house and surprise them." With the help of her animal friends, she performs as a wonderful housekeeper. She sings merrily while doing the household chores, denoting how happy and satisfied she is. Furthermore, not only does she surprise them by performing as a housekeeper, she also teaches them manners and takes care of them like a mother. With her help, the seven dwarfs become clean and well-mannered children/men. Snow White performs a perfect female role as a mother/wife: she cleans the house, prepares meals, and takes good care of her children/men. The messages here are clear: the best place for a woman is the home, and the best job for her is cleaning, cooking and nurturing children. Through the changes, Disney constructs Snow White as a mother figure.

This is the same in Disney's second fairy-tale animated film, *Cinderella*. Besides Disney's version, perhaps the world's most famous Cinderella story would be Perrault's and Brothers Grimm's versions. Grimm's Cinderella is allowed to leave the ball voluntarily whereas Perrault's Cinderella is asked to leave the ball before midnight because the magic spell will be broken by then. Grimm's Cinderella apparently possesses a higher subjective agency and is presented as more active and cheerful than Perrault's counterpart. Instead of choosing Grimm's version, Disney employs Perrault's tale as the pretext of its animated film. This is because Perrault's tale is, as Bonnie Cullen argues, "the best vehicle for Victorian notions of femininity,"[64] which coincides with patriarchal values in American society in the post-war era, a time when women were urged to go back home from the workforce in order to perform their maternal tasks (74). The portrayal of Disney's Cinderella as a good mother is established from the beginning of the film. In an early scene, when told there is a new mouse in the house, "Cinderella immediately responds by opening a drawer full of tiny clothes, saying 'She'll need a dress'" (Wood, 37). Like Snow White, not only does Cinderella provide the mice with food and clothes, she also teaches/civilizes them, and protects them from the attacks of the cat Lucifer. Besides being a capable mother,

[64] Cullen argues that Perrault's version of Cinderella was much preferable to other versions in the19th century because the values represented in Perrault's tale ere equivalent to the patriarchal values in theVictorian period. For further detail, see Cullen, Bonnie. "For Whom the Shoe Fits: Cinderella in the Hands of Victorian Illustrators ad Writers." *The Lion and the Unicorn* 27.1 (2003): 57-82.

Cinderella also performs a superb housekeeping job in the animation. After feeding the whole family, she scrubs the terrace, sweeps the halls and the stairs efficiently and merrily. Her elegant manner and happy mood denote how graceful woman can be when doing household chores and how happy a woman is as a housekeeper. To perform as a good mother and capable housekeeper is to perform preferable femininity according to the standards of patriarchal society. Performing preferable femininity assures that the heroine will be rewarded, often by marriage, when the story closes. Disney's first two princesses, Snow White and Cinderella, to some extent can be said to have been ill-treated by unjust parents, and their families are in some aspect dysfunctional. It is through performing preferable femininity that they can reverse the status quo. Performing preferable femininity will win them a husband, who usually comes from the highest social status and will lead them to a better life. Through suggesting that the maternal and housekeeping features are the key for the two ill-treated heroines to step into upper class, Disney's animated films do not provide an alternative female model for a child audience; instead, they reinforce traditional gender roles.

In reality, Disney's reinforcement of traditional female roles is consistent with American government policy in the post-war era. Many critics (Strom, 1985; Kessler-Harris, 1989; Casper and Bianchi, 2002) have pointed out that American women had entered the paid workforce during World War II when men joined the battlefield and that thousands of American women were compelled to leave their jobs after the war in order to create job vacancies for returned soldiers. Government policy, in place since the New Deal in 1933, for example, expressively defined "the worker as male" who needed "a wage large enough to support a wife and children" (Boris, 1). When jobs were for men, women were urged to go back home to perform maternal and housekeeping tasks. Conglomerate media like Disney was often in complicity with the American government because it helped to construct woman as mother and housekeeper. In 1959, Disney launched its third fairy-tale animated film, *Sleeping Beauty*, in which gender construction of the heroine still had a strong relation with the representation of family value. However, unlike the previous two films, in which Snow White and Cinderella are "actively" performing maternal roles at the beginning of the films, constructing Aurora as a mother in *Sleeping Beauty* is through the wish of the two kings. In Disney's retelling, the motifs of the kings' longing for grandchildren and the importance of childrearing have been emphasized, contributing to define Princess Aurora as a mother. Nevertheless, the old generation's wish, the newly occurring motif, is often presented as in conflict with the

young generation's desire.

In *Sleeping Beauty*, Aurora and Prince Philip fall in love without knowing that they are already betrothed. The young couple intends to marry someone they love whereas the old kings want them to marry someone they have chosen for them. The conflict is also highlighted when the young generation dreams of love and romance while the old parents are thinking of grandchildren. The Disney film implies that the mission of romance and love is the province of the young, and the responsibility of continuing family is for the old. Due to the different missions they have in different life stages, parent and child are bound to have conflicts. Even though Aurora and Philip's falling in love with each other in a sense implicates that they follow their parents' wish, it is apparent that the conflicts between parent and child are figured in terms of the opposition between, in Wood's terms, "old-fashioned parents and modern young people" (44). The representation of parent/child relationship in Disney's early fairy-tale film productions has shifted from unjust parents versus mistreated children to old-fashioned parents versus modern children, which probably could be regarded as Disney's effort in presenting different points of view. Since this film, marrying for love has become a recurring theme in Disney's film productions as it is represented as the equivalence of American democracy and individualist freedom.

In *The Little Mermaid*, the opposition between parent and child is rendered through Ariel's adolescent curiosity and her struggle against parental control. While King Triton believes humans are barbarians and mermaids shall not have human contact, Ariel insists on doing things in her own way. As she continues exploring and approaching the human world, the generational conflict between her and her father escalates to its peak. Ariel's longing for freedom and willingness to take action to gain her desire construes her as a rebellious teenager eager to exercise agency. However, her quest for freedom has transformed into a quest for love/marriage from the moment she encounters Prince Eric. In Sells' term, "her interest in the role of citizen becomes supplanted by her interest in the role of wife" (180). Her dream for mobility and independence has totally been put aside. Longing for marriage, a symbol of compromising with patriarchal values, has made her change from a bad daughter to a good woman. She is no longer a rebellious daughter who dares to challenge patriarchal power; she is now a good woman who is domesticated by patriarchal regulations. The relationship between parent and child and how it constructs the heroine's gender representation also works in a similar way in *Aladdin*.

To Princess Jasmine, the freedom and mobility she desires for at the beginning has become a dream for romance after she encounters Aladdin/Prince Ali. While Jasmine is

thinking of romance and love, her father's main concern is the advantages of a political marriage alliance, or an arranged marriage. The contrast between young and old is again apparent. The opposition between generations in *Aladdin* functions similarly to that in the previous film productions; nevertheless, the image of parent/father has once again changed. Following the unjust parent in the early films, the old-fashioned parent was once the most representative paternal figure in Disney's film productions before it is gradually substituted by an impotent father. Under Disney's construction, Jasmine's father is now not only old-fashioned, but also impotent. As Giroux notices, an impotent father figure is common in Disney's film productions:

> Given Disney's purported obsession with family values, especially as a consuming unit, it is curious that, with the exception of *Mulan*, there are no strong mothers or fathers in these films. Not only are powerful mothers absent, but all of the father figures are portrayed as weak or stupid. Only the mermaid has a domineering father. Jasmine's father is outwitted by his aides, and Belle's father is an airhead (103).

Strictly speaking, Mulan's father is not a strong father. He is physically decrepit, but emotionally encouraging, a frequent paternal figure in Disney's films. The weakness of father, especially in *Beauty and the Beast* and *Mulan*, seems to exist in symbiotic relation with gender construction of the heroines. Although *Beauty and the Beas*t was released in 1991, seven years before the release of *Mulan*, the two films bear numerous similarities in terms of the representation of fathers and how the father/daughter relationship constructs the gender of the two heroines. The two films implicitly suggest a formula: a weak father is unable to maintain a secure domestic environment, and a heroine with a weak father is thereby propelled into the world and into a position which provides a possibility of agentic actions.

When the films begin, both Belle and Mulan are portrayed as outsiders who do not fit into their societies. While Belle is regarded as "peculiar" and "rather odd" from the viewpoint of the villagers, Mulan is considered as a "failure" by her villagers. She gets dressed up like a bride to impress the matchmaker and hopes to bring her family great honour by striking a good match. Her failure to pass the test denotes not only that she cannot bring her family honour through marriage, but also that she does not fit into her community like other girls do. Her unfitness and isolation in her community could also be

illustrated through the villagers' loathing look at her when she walks out from the matchmaker's house. The solo "Reflection" expresses her unfitness:

> Look at me ... I will never pass for a perfect bride
> Or a perfect daughter
> Can it be?
> I'm not meant to play this part?
> Now I see
> That if I were truly to be myself
> I would break my family's heart.
>
> Who is that girl I see
> Staring straight back at me
> Why is my reflection someone I don't know
> Somehow I cannot hide
> Who I am, though I've tried
> When will my reflection show
> Who I am inside?
> When will my reflection show
> Who I am, inside? (Reflection, Disney's *Mulan*)

The song states her "conflict between individuality and social conformity" and her inner struggle "between the person her culture and community expect her to be and the person she is inside" (McCallum, 120). In other words, Mulan's true self fails to meet the expectation for girls in her community, or in patriarchal society.

Belle and Mulan do not fit into their communities, and their peculiarity and eccentricity are due to their unwillingness or incapability to meet the expectation of marriage for girls in their societies. While Belle refuses the marriage proposed by Gaston, who is thought to be the best choice for girls in the village, Mulan pursues marriage in order to please her family. However, her failure to pass the test, a test about proper gender performance, indicates her incapability to perform traditional femininity. Both of the heroines are to some extent isolated from their communities, and their isolation in consequence strengthens the intimate relationship with their fathers.

Belle's father is an air-headed inventor whereas Mulan's father is an aging soldier. Inventing and serving in the military are typically and traditionally regarded as male occupations. Through the typical male tasks, both of the father figures perform traditional masculinity. However, they are not really represented as desirable male figures. Maurice is presented as a mechanically-minded man gone wrong in the film. He is both physically and mentally weak; he is probably the most fragile father so far in Disney's film productions. Fa Zhou is depicted as a retired soldier: physically decrepit, but mentally strong. In

Disney's version Maurice has been transformed from a merchant, who originally possesses a more complex personality in other *Beauty and the Beast* retellings, to a simple-minded, weak and vulnerable inventor. Disney's simplifying the personality of Maurice, along with the omission of the sisters, reinforces Maurice's dependence on Belle. Maurice's dependence and Belle's isolation from the community intensify the intimacy and emotional attachment between father and daughter. When Maurice is depressed by his invention, Belle reassures him that he will become a world famous inventor; when Belle is disturbed by the villagers, Maurice in return comforts her with the idea that his invention will be the beginning of their new life.

The relationship between father and daughter works in a similar way in *Mulan*. The intimacy between Mulan and her father is best shown in the sequence of the cherry blossom moment. Fa Zhou, by employing a flower metaphor, tries to ease the humiliation Mulan experienced from her failure in the matchmaking meeting. He tells her: "what beautiful blossoms we have this year. But look, this one is late. I bet when it blooms, it will be the most beautiful of all." The blossom moment defines the love and the close relationship between Mulan and her father and also justifies, in westerner's eyes, why later Mulan is willing to put her life at risk for her father. The father/daughter relationship in these two films exists in a symbiotic mode: they emotionally rely on each other, and they need each other to continue their life/story. Without Belle and Mulan, Maurice and Fa Zhou could not live on. Without their fathers, the two heroines would not be able to launch a journey which enables them to perform agentic actions.

Also, the heroines' non-conformity with their societies hints that their stories will happen in another place, where it is not necessary for girls to perform traditional femininity. While Belle's story is set in the Beast's castle as his prisoner, Mulan ventures into spacious mountains and battlefields as a soldier. Compared with Disney's previous heroines, Belle and Mulan are attributed with a higher level of agency because both of them are brave, independent, and capable of taking action. Belle rides out in the forest in order to find her father, she is willing to take her father's place as the Beast's prisoner, she rejects the proposal of Gaston, a symbol of patriarchy, and she returns to the Beast of her own free will. Disney's Belle seems a promising feminist model for a child audience. Deborah Ross argues that in the film "the heroine is more subject than object because her quest for a desirable mate drives the plot" (61). Jarriet Hawkins avers that it is "good to have a popular film portray love between equally strong, equally intelligent, equally matched male and female characters" (263). Other critics, such as David Ansen, Brian Johnson and

Janet Maslin, also share the same praise for Disney's innovation of a different type of heroine. However, while many of the critics applaud Disney's innovation on the action-taking heroine, many still consider the film as "the same old story" (Cummins, 22). Teresa de Lauretis perceives Belle as a "literary topos" through which "the hero and his story move to their destination" (109). Susan Jeffords notices that Disney inverts the plot order by telling the audience why the curse is put on at the outset, and she therefore argues that this change actually makes the movie "really the story of the Beast, and not of Beauty—or Belle, as she is called in the Disney movie—at all" (166-7). Besides, the femininity Belle performs, under Disney's modification, is seemingly feminist, but in reality traditional and conservative.

In the film, Belle shows her dissatisfaction with her provincial life, denoting her desire for adventure, which could be developed into a drive for agentic actions. However, her favourite story is about "far off places, daring swordfights, magic spells, a prince in disguise," and her favorite part is when the heroine "meets Prince Charming, but she won't discover that it's him till chapter three." She is not as feminist as she appears to be. Her desire is in conformity with other girls' because every girl "is supposed" to be fond of romance, and what she dreams is exactly what will happen to her in the film. Through dreaming for a romance, she also performs traditionally preferable femininity. Furthermore, in the Beast's castle she is not treated as a prisoner; instead, she acts more as his private tutor. Private tutoring has long been regarded as a "proper" job for women. Through teaching him, Belle once again performs traditional femininity according to the expectation of patriarchy. Her teaching, or performing preferable femininity, is essential for him to learn to love people and to transform from an undesirable cruel man to a desirable male. Also, Belle's strong attachment with her father to some extent constructs her as a traditional female figure because the demonstration of her love for him is made through sacrifice, a virtue that a good woman/daughter should have. Although Maurice's weakness does provide Belle with a chance to be an agentic subject, her strong love for him trickily prevents her from having a different story. As Cummins rightly argues, Belle's love for her father draws her "back into the family circle and den[ies] her the chance to act for her own sake" (25). Disney's emphasis on the heroine's sacrificial love for her father greatly restricts Belle from having subjective agency, and this is the same in *Mulan* although it is represented with slight differences.

Gillian Youngs observes that Mulan and her motivations "are depicted as highly relational. The family, and particularly paternal influence, is central in this respect. Even

though the heroine has broken out of the largely domestic boundaries…, her actions and desires retain strong associations with them" (313). In Disney's adaptation, the father is the catalyst for Mulan's adventure. Like Belle, Mulan performs properly as a daughter, sacrificing herself for her father, and by doing so she earns the opportunity to become independent. However, Mulan differs from Belle in that Belle is asked to sacrifice for her father several times in *Beauty and the Beast* whereas the motif of sacrifice occurs only once in *Mulan*. While Belle has been constantly drawn back to the family circle, Mulan is allowed to perform subjective agency in the spacious mountains. With Disney's manipulations, Mulan enjoys having agency in the adventure despite some minor troubles at the beginning of her army career. As Flanagan avers about female-to-male cross-dressing stories in children's literature, "[c]ross-dressing allows [the heroines] to inhabit the world of men and experience many of the liberties denied them when they are dressed and perceived as feminine" (100). Mulan's ingenious performance of masculinity allows her to experience liberties and agency, and as Flanagan suggests, brings a destabilizing effect to the socially and culturally produced gender categories.

In Disney's adaptation, Mulan's successful cross-dressing act is not used to further challenge the gender status quo; on the contrary, it reinforces socially prescribed gender categories because Mulan's bringing home a man as the ending of the film suggests her quest is an old one. The theme of bringing back a man is actually in accordance with the marriage theme with which the film opens. Achieving a good marriage to please her family is Mulan's wish. Her failure in the bride-selection test indicates that she cannot find a husband through a traditional way; she has to find her man in her own way. After she experiences such an unusual journey, bringing back a man, signifying the coming of marriage, is her reward. This denotes that what she wants is the same as the other girls and thereby implants the quest for marriage as a (sub-)theme of her journey. It is her wish to please her family through marriage, and she makes it at the end. Bringing back a man not only discloses that Mulan's actions are highly related to her family's desire but also signifies her compromise with the patriarchal system. With numerous promising modifications, Disney's Mulan still cannot escape the Confucian metanarrative of the Mulan story; or to put it in another way, Mulan still cannot escape the conservative configuration of gender stereotype in Disney's film productions. Under her seemingly feminist gender performance, she shares the same blood with the other Disney princesses.

Americanizing the Chinese heroine and her story

The conformity of Mulan's gender performance with her Disney predecessors indicates this Chinese heroine has been Americanized. The transformation of the heroine and her story can be viewed, as Liu and Zhou (2007) suggest, "as a dialogue between Chinese and American culture;" it is also a process of integrating different cultures in order to appeal to young Caucasian viewers so that it also manifests the trend of "cultural glocalization" (67). As many others including Ma (2000), McCallum (2002), and Dong (2006) have pointed out, Disney's Mulan is an American teenager. She has a Chinese appearance, but her way of thinking and behaviour are American. Although a number of research works have discussed how Mulan is culturally American, few studies have explored the issue from the perspective of gender performance. Focusing on the heroine's gender performance, the following discussion will deal with how the Chinese heroine has been altered to an American girl; it will also pivot on the modifications Disney made to its pretext, *The Ballad of Mulan*, in order to see how the alterations transform this once culture-specific story about filial piety to a story embedded with the ideas of democracy and individualist freedom, namely, American values.

The first time Mulan appears in the film she is just waking up, still in bed and in her underwear, a very unusual initial appearance for the Chinese heroine. She writes cheating notes on her arm, and then feeds chickens in a comedic but clever way. The first encounter impresses us that she is clumsy, smart, and creative, all very unusual features in a representation of a young Chinese female. Strikingly different from the usual weaving scene, the first appearance of Mulan represents her as an anti-traditional girl. The gender behaviour she performs here could be very unusual to Chinese eyes, but amusing to the eyes of westerners. The following sequence continues the delightful and amusing atmosphere while Mulan is passively made over as a perfect bride. Her passivity in performing femininity discloses her unfitness for the match-making culture, as argued earlier. The meeting with the Matchmaker, representing "the strictest interpretation of what is expected of Mulan by her culture," turns out to be a disaster (Kurtti, 168). However, in Disney's comical representation Mulan's awkwardness in performing femininity and the Matchmaker's hysterical behaviour serve to align viewer sympathy with Mulan.

The comical effect starts when the ink, coming from Mulan's cheating notes, rubs off with a squeak on the Matchmaker's face. Writing notes on her arm before the meeting denotes Mulan's lack of confidence in performing traditional femininity. Her improper behaviour in attempting to cheat in Disney's representation contributes to the dramatic

effect of the sequence. The comical effect reaches its climax when Mulan desperately fans the smoking spot of the bottom of the Matchmaker and it bursts into flame and Mulan has no choice but to throw tea over the Matchmaker in order to put out the fire. Making fun of the Matchmaker, though Mulan does not intend to do so, could be regarded as a challenge to the patriarchal system. The match-making meeting, which is supposed to be official and serious, is represented as disastrous and hilarious. The Matchmaker, the judge of Chinese girls' gender performance, who is supposed to be respected, is portrayed as ridiculous, hysterical and funny in the film. Peng Baoliang has pointed out:

> … being a match-maker is usually a lucrative and respectable business. In the film *Mulan* match-making is dramatized and exaggerated. To the American audience who enjoy the complete freedom to choose a life partner, the meddling of a fat and fussy woman as a go-between makes the Chinese custom of match-making even more ridiculous and laughable" (137).

Through dramatizing the Matchmaker and the match-making process, the Disney film makes fun of the Chinese culture. When the Chinese custom of match-making is represented as ridiculous and hilarious, Mulan's failure in passing the test will not be considered as a failure in the eyes of the audience.

Also, the Matchmaker's furious comment on Mulan at the end of the meeting— "you are a disgrace. You may look like a bride, but you will never bring your family honour"— symbolizes the evaluation of Mulan by patriarchy and also reveals Mulan's inability in performing traditional Chinese femininity, equivalence of passivity and inactivity. However, when patriarchy is portrayed as funny and ridiculous, its legitimacy for judging the heroine becomes problematic. Mulan's disgrace is not a disgrace at all. To quote Peng again, "[t]o the Western viewers her disgrace is above all the disgrace of the Chinese nation. Her shortcomings that incur disgrace turn out to be personal merits and strong points for kids in the West" (137). With Disney's modifications, the western child audiences may easily feel sympathetic with Mulan, the victim of an old-fashioned and unjust culture. By poking fun at Chinese custom and depicting Mulan as victimized within the Chinese culture, the film implicitly situates China as 'other' and Mulan as American 'self.'

Furthermore, Mulan's inner struggle in the film could easily invite alignment from young Caucasian viewers. In the second part of her solo 'Reflection,' she keeps singing

"who I am inside" revealing her doubts about self-merits and her desire for self-identity. As Dong puts it, "[t]hematically this song [Reflection] functions as a monologue through which the heroine expresses her longing for an accredited individuality before she goes to the battlefield in cross-dressing" (229). The inner struggle of the heroine has never occurred before her father is recruited by the imperial army and the motif of self-quest has never become an important motif in the Mulan retellings produced from China and Sinophone regions although in some retellings the heroine is represented as eager to prove her merits and ability. Unveiling the heroine's desire for self-quest at the outset can transform the story in conformity with western convention, and it will also be easier for young Caucasian viewers, the main target audience of the film, to "identify with Mulan's adventure away from home in the sense that it mirrors their quest for adolescent self-identity" (Dong, 229).

Another distinctive change Disney made in the film is the heroine's leaving home without her parents' permission. In the film, Mulan literally runs away from home although her momentous decision is presented as undergoing many psychological struggles. In the sequence, she sits under a statue of a dragon in the garden, crying in the rain. There is thunder and lightning, signifying she is in a state of chaos. She sees her parents talking seriously through the window of the house. Her father picks up the candle and blows it out. Mulan ponders for a while, and then makes the decision. From then on, the actions become more active and dynamic: "[s]he takes her father's conscription order, cuts her long hair, and dons her father's armour—prepared to risk everything that matters to her, in order to save everything that matters to her" (Kurtti, 173). The rapid montage signifies her determination. Running away from home without parental permission means that she will be completely responsible for her decision. According to Confucian teaching, her sacrificial act enables her to perform as a good daughter. However, as modified by Disney, she ironically breaks the law a dutiful daughter should follow in order to be dutiful. As Sheng-Mei Ma observes:

> … this "running-away" sequence radically deviates from the Chinese poem "The Ballad of Mulan" as well as from Kingston. "The Ballad" depicts Mulan's substitution as a family decision rather than a solo performance…. Mulan Disney has, in a manner of speaking, turned her back on the very meaning of the tale of Mulan in China. The Mu Lan legend has long been regarded as one of the many deeds of filial piety…. While retaining the theme of self-sacrifice, Disney has

excised the heavy didactic, moralistic tone of the Chinese Mulan (137-138).

The sequence of running away from home can on the one hand dismiss the didactic and moralistic tone from the original story and on the other hand enable the heroine to be more heroic, individualist, and thus more westernized. Disney's animation is not the only Mulan retelling to depict the heroine leaving home as a personal decision. The "insect" version of the retelling, *The Secret of Mulan*, released by UAV Entertainment one year before Disney's animation, portrayed Mulan's crucial decision as entirely her own. UAV was presumably attempting to pre-empt the Disney production, and the makers either had access to the story as Disney was telling it or used the same cultural "scripts." This coincidence could be regarded as their effort to westernize the Chinese heroine in order to appeal to a young American audience. Apart from these two adaptations, Divers' Belgium retelling and Dokey's American retelling, as discussed in Chapter Three, both describe Mulan as a running-away heroine, disclosing the propensity for a more liberal, individualistic, and in consequence more westernized heroine in these western Mulan retellings.

Besides Mulan, Fa Zhou—the father figure—has to some extent been westernized in Disney's animation. As discussed in the previous section, the image of Fa Zhou has a strong relation to the heroine's gender construction. His weak and emotional-encouraging image is presented in accordance with both Disney practice and modern western convention. In his discussion of the cultural imaginary about the "Orient" in Disney's *Mulan*, Zhao Ting-Hui observes that the father image Disney represents "is not an 'authentic' Chinese father, but an 'ideal' western father" (77). He illustrates that the garden scene where Mulan and her father have an intimate talk has transplanted the western value system of emphasis on communication between parent and child to the Chinese story, and that the focus on filial piety in the original story does not fit into the western narrative convention and therefore is substituted by the family value in which the love between father and daughter is what really counts (72). The intimate interaction between Fa Zhou and Mulan is a common scene in Hollywood family movies. Through intimating the relationship between the heroine and her father, Disney has replaced Confucian doctrine, filial piety, in the story by the American style of family value.

Although Fa Zhou has to some extent been westernized in the way he shows love to Mulan, he is portrayed as the representative of Chinese culture. This is best shown in the

sharp contrast between him and Mulan. As Robyn McCallum succinctly sums up, "[t]he contrast between his age and frailty and her youth and vigor figures not only the failed (paternal) body, but also the failure of (Eastern) patriarchy, implicit in the film's underlying critique of traditional social customs such as arranged marriages" (126). She is young, modern, strong and representing America whereas he is aging, old-fashioned, frail and representing China. She can never understand why fighting for one's country is related to family honour because she and her father have different concepts of value. In contrast to Fa Zhou, who believes the benefit of community takes priority over individual benefit, Mulan is portrayed as an individualist. While Fa Zhou tends to draw a close connection between national security and family honour, Mulan's decision to join the war is due to personal consideration. She perceives taking her father's place in the army as not merely the only way to save his life but also as her personal trial of courage and wisdom.

The development of her character becomes apparent once the trial begins in the film. In her analysis of the parallelism between the construction of masculinity and femininity in Disney *Mulan*, McCallum suggests "[t]here is also an obvious contrast between Mulan's active construction of self (as a male), here, and the earlier makeover scene in which she is the passive subject of her culture's construction of femininity" (126-127). Compared to Mulan's passivity in performing a traditional Chinese bride, the representation of her transformation from a female to a male soldier is dynamic and active. The rapid montage shows that she takes her father's sword, cuts her hair short and puts on his armour in a swift and determined manner, denoting Mulan actively crosses the boundary between genders. To dress up like a man is essential in her construction of masculinity. Nevertheless, cutting hair short is not really necessary in the eyes of Chinese because both female and male had long hair in ancient China. But long hair has been regarded as a symbol of femininity. Cutting her hair short thus, as Zhao suggests, means Mulan actively eliminates her feminine features and prepares to enter the masculine space (74). In the original ballad, there is no detailed description about the cross-dressing process when Mulan disguises herself and transforms from a female to a male; however, there is a comprehensive depiction about her gender performance when she takes off the armour and puts on her former feminine clothes. This is because Mulan's cross-dressing act is considered as a temporary state and she will eventually retrieve a female role. Although Disney's heroine is destined to return to patriarchy as her ballad predecessor, the construction of story is to a large extent different. In Disney's animation the heroine's active construction of masculinity signifies her transformation or personal growth because the story is going to be

her quest for self-identity. The theme of personal growth can also be seen in the training sequence.

In most of the Mulan retellings, the heroine is presented as a qualified soldier before her army career starts. Often she learns martial arts and even the art of war from her father or some other masculine masters. With excellent martial skills, the synonym of masculinity on the battlefield, the heroine is able to gain permission to enter masculine space. However, Disney's heroine is presented as a beginner when she first joins the army. When the captain, Shang, starts the training lessons, Mulan is often left behind other soldiers. She can't catch up with them, which implicitly suggests her incompetence in performing masculinity. But, while the training is in progress, the strong-willed Mulan makes improvements little by little. She learns how to fight, shoot and catch fish in the river; she is the first person in the army who fetches an arrow from the top of a high pole, which she does by combining skill with intelligence in order to convert the weights designed to impede into an asset. Because Mulan is portrayed as an inexperienced soldier at the outset, the audience will be able to see her growth as the film goes on.

During her quest, Mulan constructs not only masculinity but also femininity, or modern-style femininity, although the construction of femininity is represented in an implicit way. McCallum observes that in the film that there are a series of point-of-view shots in which Shang "is frequently represented from Mulan's female viewpoint: thus his mysteriousness or otherness is represented as being constructed from a female point of view" (122). Through the manipulation of spectatorial gaze, Shang is represented as the object of the heroine's gaze. By doing so, Mulan is able to not only perform a different type of femininity, but possess more subjective power which attributes her with the power to gaze at a man, the object of her sexual desire, in public. When she is in "her" community she can only passively wait to become someone's bride whereas she has the power to express her desire in spite of, ironically, her disguise as a man during her adventure. The different type of femininity she performs here forms a sharp contrast to the traditional Chinese femininity she was incapable of performing earlier. It is a modern style of femininity, or a western style of femininity, the feature a woman must have if she believes one should marry for love. However, McCallum also points out that constructing a male object from a female point of view "reinscribes traditional gender notions of natural gender differences, figuring an essential masculinity that is powerful, separate and unknowable: the appropriate object of feminine admiration and desire" (122). In the animation, the construction of Shang as Mulan's object of feminine desire in reality transforms the story

to be more in conformity with Disney's conservative convention, and it also paves the way for the heroine's adventure of self-quest to be transformed into a quest for marriage. Traditional it might be, but the femininity Mulan performs in the army is by no means traditional if compared with the traditional Chinese femininity she demonstrated in the early makeover sequence. With Disney's modification, the gender behaviours Mulan performs in the army are still based on the expectation of patriarchy, although it is now western/modern patriarchy.

Disney's closure of the film with a strong implication that Mulan will bring home a man is not an innovation for the Mulan narrative. As many other retellings, marriage often is the destiny of the heroine who once challenged polarized gender categories. Perhaps due to the deep-rooted patriarchal ideology embedded in the story, it is tempting to transform the story into the heroine's quest for love. But the difference Disney made here is that Mulan follows an American script. She is allowed to perform femininity according to western patriarchal regulations with the condition that she should not violate the basic system of patriarchy. Therefore, in the film, she should be watched by a guardian, of course a western one. In his discussion about how Mushu, the dragon, is the substitute of patriarchy, Zhao points out that Mushu functions as a patriarchal figure in the film because he is the one who teaches Mulan how to behave like men, the one who names the disguised Mulan, and the one who protects her virginity once there is a danger of being exposed (75). He is the one who ensures the stability of the western patriarchal system. Although portrayed as a dragon, the symbol of China, he is by no means a Chinese dragon. Apart from Disney's convention in inventing animal friends as the heroine's companions, the construction of Mushu is based on Disney/western conventions. He is described as travel-sized, cunning, witty and humorous, all loveable features of Disney's animal characters. Furthermore, he can breathe fire: a prominent feature of Western dragons; fire-breathing is not a characteristic of Chinese dragons. In the film, Mushu's most important mission is to prevent the gender identity of the cross-dressing American heroine from being revealed by men, Chinese men to be more precise, and he is destined to fail to secure her secret because she is going to save China as a woman, an American woman.

As many critics notice, the most striking addition Disney made in the film is the death punishment after the gender identity of the heroine is exposed. It is so far, among my collections, the only Mulan retelling in which the heroine has almost been executed due to her disguised gender identity. In the film, Mulan shoots the last cannon at a glacial overhang, causing an avalanche that buries the Hun army. She is wounded so that her

secret is revealed by the doctor. According to the "Chinese" patriarchal law, the cross-dressing heroine should be executed. Shang waives her death penalty because she had previously saved his life. However, she is still charged with bringing dishonour to the army and therefore is abandoned by them in the snow. The irrationality and cruelty of Chinese patriarchal law is constructed in accordance with westerner's clichéd notion of China since none of the Mulan retellings describes the heroine facing the death penalty after her gender identity is revealed regardless of whether this happens after the war or in the middle of war. The irrational and cruel Chinese feudalism therefore needs redemption by the West.

In Disney's adaptation, the security of the whole of China relies on the American-type heroine. The war between China and a foreign invader becomes a life-and-death battle between Mulan and Shan Yu, the leader of the Huns. As the film goes on, she is represented as highly inventive. Following the ingenuity she shows in the earlier sequences where she feeds the chickens, climbs the pole and fires the cannon in ingenious ways, she once again demonstrates that she is a person of great resourcefulness. She defeats Shan Yu in a creative way, and with her guidance, the fallen Chinese army is able to accomplish their mission to protect China. In brief, she is a problem-solving expert. She embodies American know-how. However, it is noteworthy that her ingenious fighting plan also leads to the collapse of imperial buildings. As Peng suggests, "… [the Emperor's] palace is heavily damaged (a few columns have been cut, the roof has been punctured). This damage is devastating. It physically destroys the perfection of the palace and it metaphorically undermines Chinese feudalism and imperialism" (136). Representing an old and fragile man as the Chinese Emperor, the Disney film implicitly suggests the weakness of China and its feudalism, which cannot withstand even a single blow. Salvation must come from a stronger and superior power. The contrast between the Chinese Emperor's refusal to bow to Shan Yu and his willingness to bow to Mulan, the saviour of China, indicates the superiority of Western power. When Mulan stands high in the Imperial city receiving the Chinese people's worship, it symbolically denotes the fall of Chinese values and the rise of Western values. Furthermore, Mulan's saving China as a woman also signifies that American woman is superior to Chinese man. While Chinese men are unable to keep the foreign invaders beyond the border, American woman can easily defeat the invaders by combining her strength and wisdom. Her triumph as an American woman justifies not only her anti-traditional behaviour but also the social practices of the West in China.

In practice, then, western values underpin a seemingly Chinese story. In the film,

Disney obviously exoticizes the icons of Chinese culture. Based on his observation, Ma cites abundant examples of Orientalist representations, such as the icon of the dragon, the kung fu sequence, the Great Wall and the Forbidden City, to name but a few (130). Through the massive adaptation of Chinese cultural icons, Disney creates an Orientalist setting and atmosphere in the film; however, the story is essential western. It has been transformed into an American story. During the process of transformation, Chinese culture encounters American culture, in consequence forming a dialogue between eastern and western societies. In the film, there is a parallel between transforming the Chinese heroine into an American heroine and the substitution of Chinese culture by American culture, suggesting western femininity is preferable and western values are superior.

Freedom of Women: Imaginary Chinese values versus American values in *Mulan II*

Following the triumph of the animation, Disney launched the DVD sequel, *Mulan II*, in 2005. In this sequel, the American girl becomes the model of every girl in China. After successfully keeping the foreign threat away from the border, Mulan has become a well-known "national" woman warrior. People in China all love her, particularly young girls. The man she brought from the battlefield, now General Shang, proposes marriage to her. Soon after their engagement, they are entrusted with a mission by the Chinese Emperor. This time they have to escort three Chinese princesses to a neighboring country, named Qui Gong, in three days to participate in arranged marriages, through which the Emperor plans to forge an alliance with the kingdom of Qui Gong in order to defeat their enemy—now the Mongol—without the use of force. In the film the princesses fall in love with Shang's three fellow soldiers as the trip proceeds, and they are struggling to decide whether to follow their hearts or remain dutiful to their father, the Emperor. On the way to the neighboring country, they are attacked by a group of bandits, and Shang is thought to be dead. Not knowing Shang is still alive, Mulan plans to finish the mission by taking the princess' place to marry the prince of Qui Gong. But with the help of Mushu, she is finally married with Shang, and the three princesses are released from their vow and may marry anyone they like.

As in *Mulan*, there is a comparable appropriation of quasi-feminist discourse and cultural imaginary about the Orient underpinning *Mulan II*. Focusing on the gender performance of not only Mulan but also the three Chinese princesses, this section will examine how Disney refashions a new adventure for the "Chinese" heroine in accordance

with again western narrative conventions and western cultural assumptions about China, and how Mulan and the three Chinese princesses perform contrastive gender behaviours in which there is a strong indication that an American girl is happier than a Chinese girl and that American culture is superior to Chinese culture. Also, the discussion will further argue that Disney/western discourse tends to use the issue of women's freedom to criticize the culture of others in order to persuade people from other cultures to adopt western values.

At the beginning of *Mulan II*, Mulan is depicted while practicing her martial skills in a field, with lots of young village girls watching her with widened eyes in admiration. She is apparently happier and more confident than she was in the previous animation. "We want to be like you, Fa Mulan," the young Chinese girls exclaim. Unable to resist their request, Mulan then gives instructions about how to be a good warrior. These instructions may in turn be identified with tips about how to be a confident/modern/American girl. Mulan claims that the key is to be gentle and tough at the same time and bring it all into balance. While gentleness is a feature of femininity, toughness is masculinity. Having balanced feminine and masculine features is the key to perform a modern style of femininity. As she claims, "one alone is not enough." The problem for Chinese girls is that they perform only gentleness, the equivalence to traditional femininity based on Eastern patriarchy. In the Kung fu sequence, where Mulan instructs the young village girls in Kung Fu skills, she is constructed as a teacher for the next female generation of China. Right after the Kung Fu lesson, Shang arrives and proposes marriage to Mulan. In the film, the marriage-proposing scene is presented from the perspectives of Mulan's father and grandmother. Through their viewpoint, the audience can only hear Mulan scream out loud and then she jumps onto Shang and pushes him on the ground. Her almost hysterical reaction is by no means traditional and exactly demonstrates her confidence in showing her real emotion. The confidence and the easiness with which she performs is what Chinese girls lack and need, and it is also what makes her stand out in China.

There is an even more striking difference between Mulan and the three Chinese princesses, whose gender performance is strictly defined by Chinese patriarchy. Under Disney's construction, Mulan, Shang, and the three soldiers are waiting for the princesses at a side door of the imperial palace. It is at night and the atmosphere is tranquil and mysterious. The shadows of the princesses become lengthened as they move slowly toward the front. When they have completely emerged from the shade, it becomes clear that they wear long dark clothes and hold fans to cover their faces. Their conservative manner and dark coloured clothes comprise a dramatic contrast with Mulan's open and confident

manner and her brightly coloured costume. In *Mulan* the fan was used by the heroine as a weapon to defeat Shan Yu whereas in the DVD sequel fans are used by the three princesses as an accessory to perform traditional femininity, which is also a symbol of confinement for women and regulations ascribed by patriarchy. Although in China's feudal dynasties fans, usually round ones, were often used by ladies from upper-class families rather than by imperial princesses, in Disney's construction the fan is represented as a recognizable system of social order according to which the behaviour as well as the duties of the three Chinese princesses have been well-defined.

The three princesses have undergone a transforming process, which explicitly suggests western femininity is preferable and superior. As the journey proceeds and they are getting farther and farther away from the imperial palace, the metaphor of Chinese patriarchy, the changes in the princesses become more and more noticeable. When having their first conversation with Mulan, they respond in a cautious manner with fans covering their faces. Right after Mulan leaves, they heave sighs of relief and put away their fans with drooping shoulders. The film constructs them differently when they face others and when they are alone, suggesting their inner struggles and that they are not happy with arranged marriages. Furthermore, on the second day of the journey they take off the dark gowns and put on long dresses in bright colors, indicating that they are now livelier and have gained more freedom. As the love develops between the princesses and Shang's three soldiers, the princesses have become happier and their inner struggle increases. Inspired by Mulan, Princess Mei throws her fan on the ground, metaphorically showing her disregard for Eastern patriarchy. She writes to her father, the Chinese Emperor, and tells him that she is unable to complete the mission because her duty is to her heart. Through the song "I Wanna Be Like Other Girls," the princesses express their desire to go outside, to eat a whole cake, to dance around in their underwear, to climb up a tree like other girls. They sound very similar to Princess Jasmine in Disney's *Aladdin* as they share the same complaints about their imperial lives. Erin Addison's observation about the representation of Princess Jasmine can also be applied here:

> Jasmine, by way of complaint, lets us know that she wants to go outside, she wants to travel, make friends. She wants to wear whatever she wants to wear, and marry for love. In none of these desires does she seem much different from an American teenager. What is interesting about this list is that it reveals what *Americans imagine Arab Muslim women cannot do, but wish to* (19).

It is apparent that Disney tends to represent a uniform, totalising conception of the distinctly different Oriental cultures in the assumption that women from the Orient all have the same freedom problem. In both animations, *Aladdin* and *Mulan II*, Disney tackles the issues of women's imprisonment, and through constructing the princesses as unhappy young girls, the films implicitly criticize other cultures by imputing to them a lack of democratic practices and human rights.

What really makes Mulan different from the Chinese princesses is that she can marry for love and they can marry only someone arranged by their father. In *Mulan II*, when the heroine is told by the Emperor that she is entrusted to escort the princesses to attend the arranged marriages for political consideration, she shows her disapproval of arranged marriage without hesitation. Her first dialogue with the princesses makes her sound very foreign to the ears of people who have Chinese cultural backgrounds. She asks them about the appearance of the princes in Qui Gong and presumes that they must be handsome. When the princesses tell her they have never met them, she is so astonished as if she has no idea about the process of arranged marriages, or political marriages, in China. Apparently it is presumed that the audience, like Mulan herself, has forgotten the opening of the earlier film. As a model for Chinese girls, Mulan urges them to follow their hearts and go with their romantic impulses. Her behaviour brings tension between her, the representative of American values, and Shang, the protector of Chinese patriarchal laws. Shang tells her, "[i]n an ideal world, everyone would marry for love, but the world isn't perfect," and there is nothing they can do to help the princesses. They are in China and the world there isn't perfect so the princesses cannot marry for love. This argument raises the interesting question of where that ideal world where everyone can marry for love is. By using the contrastive words "ideal" and "not perfect," the animation demonstrates the idea of superiority and inferiority between American and Chinese societies.

In the film, the princesses are depicted as unable to resist their romantic impulses and they decide to follow their hearts as Mulan suggests. Even Shang, who fiercely opposes Mulan's viewpoint at the beginning, is finally convinced that "Mulan [is] right. No one should marry someone they don't love." Instead of remaining responsible for their duties, all of the main characters in the film choose to follow their hearts. The three princesses want to marry for love, and Shang, besides allowing the princesses to pursue their own loves, interrupts Mulan's wedding with the Qui Gong Prince and declares "I don't care what the rules say." The rules here are apparently Eastern patriarchal rules, which Shang

once tried hard to defend. His change, as well as that of the three Chinese princesses, denotes their disregard of Eastern patriarchal system and their adoption of western values. With Disney's manipulations, western values are preferable, and so is western femininity.

However, the western femininity Mulan performs is not new. It is again constituted in accordance with the western/Disney clichéd conventions about gender construction. Seemingly, Mulan urges the princesses to follow their feelings when they are confused how to decide between duty and heart; in reality, what she suggests is the princesses should follow their romantic dreams and pursue their love. Also, her excited reaction to the romance among the three couples reveals her supportive attitude to their decisions, which again reflects the Disney ideology that the most important thing for women is romance. As a "national" heroine, who is entrusted with the mission to maintain peace of the country, Mulan gives priority to romance rather than to national security. For women, love and romance comes first. Finally, the sequel begins with Shang's asking for Mulan's hand and ends with their wedding, again constructing the story as her romantic adventure. The film repetitively emphasizes that romance is what every girl wants no matter how capable she is and no matter where she is from. Like the other Disney princess collections, *Mulan II* is the same old story.

Besides its conservative gender construction, Disney's cultural representation of the Orient in *Mulan II* is in conformity with that in the previous animation, *Mulan*. Not only are the cultures of the Orient represented as exotic but also the different Orient cultures are constructed as a monotonous culture. The match-making sequence in *Mulan* is depicted in a comedic way, and the first appearance of the princesses in *Mulan II* is portrayed in an odd way, too. In feudal China, political marriages were often used to cement friendly relations with neighboring countries. According to *A New Century Chinese-English Dictionary*, political marriage (和親) is a political policy through which the Chinese monarch "attempt[s] to pacify rulers of minority nationalities in the border areas by marrying daughters of the Han imperial family to them" (647). Often, hundreds of imperial maids and escorts would accompany the princess to the country of her future husband, and most of them would stay forever so that she could have a comfortable life as before and that the Han culture could be therefore circulated in neighboring countries. The departure of the princess was often a big event in China, and it was held in a magnificent way. However, in *Mulan II*, the three princesses leave the imperial palace from a *side door at night*. Instead of being seen off by Chinese people, they are more like running away from

home secretly but with the permission of their father. The film implicitly denotes that what they are going to do is shameful and unpleasant.

Disney constructs Eastern culture as incomprehensible, and there is only one Oriental culture. As Addison points out, "[i]n the Disney-Orient, Arabia, China, India and the rest are more similar in their otherness than their cultural systems are distinct from one another" (7). In the film, China's neighbouring country Qui Gong, invented by Disney and probably named after the famous Chinese breathing exercise, Qi Gong, shares no distinct cultural differences with China. People from the two countries dress similarly and both believe in the Golden Dragon of Unity, another invention of Disney, as the god who guides them to their life partners. To quote Addison again, "the Orient does not exist" (9). What Disney represents is a western imaginary Orient. Hence, this imaginary imperfect Orient can be transformed only through the help of westerners.

It is Mushu, the western dragon, who turns the imperfect world into a perfect one. Hiding in the statue of the Golden Dragon of Unity and presenting himself as a god, Mushu commands the king of Qui Gong to let Shang marry Mulan and decrees the princesses should marry someone they love. He seems to solve the thorny problems for everyone. But it is the consideration of national security which initiates the adventure. Without the alliance with Qui Gong, China is under threat from the Mongol army. The issue of national security has been totally put aside as the narrative turns to focus on the romantic pursuit of the female characters. Samuel Huntington contends that the world is now entering a cultural conflict era in which "the United States must forge alliance with similar cultures and spread its values wherever possible. With alien civilizations the West must be accommodating if possible, but confrontational if necessary" (18). Mushu, the representative of the West, forces the king of Qui Kong to accept his idea about love and marriage, which resonates with the "efforts of the United States and other Western powers to induce other peoples to adopt Western ideas concerning democracy and human rights" (18). In the film, Mulan employs a mild way, performing as the Chinese people's model and teacher to circulate western values, while Mushu uses a relatively fierce method, threatening to put the king of Qui Kong to death, to compel people from other cultures to adopt western ideas. Either way, they spread Western values to the rest of the world, not only to the fictional world but also to the real world.

Along with the animations' entering households globally, the western ideas embedded in the films have gone global. For children world-wide, Disney is now the synonym of happiness, fun, innocence, fantasy and imagination. With its effective and profit-oriented

marketing strategies, often through cooperating with other enterprises such as McDonald's, Disney maintains its dominant position in the world child entertainment market. As Giroux suggests, "[its] control over information and [its] monopoly over the regulation of public space cannot be underestimated" (4). Also, the educational role it plays cannot be ignored as many children learn to know the cultures of other parts of the world from Disney's products. Mulan is now a global well-known heroine because of the Disney adaptation. However, as adapted by Disney, this once culture-specific story about filial piety has been converted into a story about self-quest and romance which is more in conformity with Disney's narrative conventions and which will look more familiar to Disney's main target audience, young Caucasian viewers. The gender performance of the Americanized Mulan is conventional although it is relatively anti-traditional when compared with the gender performance of the female Chinese characters in the films. Even if she has American thinking, she is not emancipated in the Disney adaptation. She is a quasi-feminist. She successfully escapes from the Eastern patriarchy, but unfortunately enters a new one, the Western patriarchy. Restrained by Disney's conservative ideology about gender construction and the Orient, the latest and the most technology-advanced narrative form for children, the animated film, is unable to endow Mulan with real subjective agency.

Mulan in Animated Cartoon Retellings

While some critics seem to regard "animation" and "animated cartoon" as synonyms, some tend to use them with reference to where they originate, such as Japanese anime and American cartoon. Alongside the swift development of technology, animation nowadays is often used in reference to the rapid display of a sequence of images, including 2D and 3D, in order to create an effect of movement. Animation no longer refers to the film products produced only from Japan because Disney and Studio Ghibli (Miyasaki Hayao) are both now the leading animation companies in the world. However, for convenience of argument, animation in this chapter applies to film productions which contain high visual quality whereas cartoon relates to the film products in which the characters are relatively flatter and less life-like. Therefore, in comparison with Disney's high-quality animation, the following four retellings are classified as animated cartoon.

As the largest child entertainment conglomerate in the world, Disney seems to possess a monopoly on the information children absorb nowadays. It is highly possible that, world-wide, children's understanding of stories such as *Snow White*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Mulan* and other stories from different cultures are based on the Disney adaptations.

Disney's interpretations of world stories have usurped the original ones and dominated over the retellings made by other companies. Although it is unlikely that the products from the relatively smaller entertainment companies could counter Disney's mighty products, it might be possible for those smaller companies to provide adaptations with different interpretations and representations. Because the four retellings are all produced in English-speaking counties, the following discussion will therefore focus on how the dialogue between western and eastern cultures is formed, how Chineseness and the Chinese heroine are constructed, and whether the four retellings are more revolutionary in terms of gender representation than Disney's adaptation.

The Secret of Mulan, an anthropomorphic insect version of the Mulan retelling, is set in a beautiful country featuring the Great Wall and West Lake, that is, famous iconic scenery in China. While it does not say this story happens in China and the word "China" has never been mentioned in the cartoon, the dragon icon in the imperial palace, the costume of people, and the scenery all denote that the background of the story is China. Mulan is represented as a headstrong village girl who is devoted to martial arts. When their evil conqueror, Mala Khan, invades the country, the cross-dressing heroine leads her army, a composite of caterpillars and butterflies, to victory. The most noticeable difference in *The Secret of Mulan* is that the cast of characters are, unexpectedly, insects and animals. While the citizens of Mulan's country are caterpillars, butterflies, rabbits, and some other imaginary animals who give a soft and gentle image, the army of their enemy consists of beetles, wasps, and turtles and some other animals with hard covering to their bodies who give an impression of hardness and strength. However, it might be noteworthy that in Chinese culture turtles and tortoises are venerated as benign creatures and often as the symbol of long life. Casting turtles as Mulan's fierce enemy could be a western misunderstanding of Chinese culture. In the cartoon, besides the big differences in nature, the enemy outnumbers Mulan's army ten to one. So, it looks almost impossible for Mulan's army to remove the foreign threat when the story unfolds. However, the increase of difficulty in defeating the enemy can construct a more heroic and outstanding heroine.

When this insect-and-animal cast cartoon opens, the caterpillar Mulan is practicing martial arts in front of her house, an open space, signifying she has more freedom than traditional girls. Her elder sister appears and shows her disapproval without hesitation. As she comments on Mulan's behaviour, "[h]ow would you ever find a husband? No man wants a rebellious headstrong girl who does not know how to behave." Her sister's remark

could be interpreted as the evaluation about Mulan by her community—a patriarchal society—in which practicing martial arts is regarded as improper behaviour for females. Mulan counters her sister in a firm voice, declaring "[y]ou behave your way. I will behave mine and we will see what happens." They will behave their ways respectively, and they will see who can find a husband. Because the motif of marriage has implicitly been introduced at the outset, the following story development will thus be likely to focus on whether Mulan can find a husband or not. The "competition" between the two sisters foretells that this is going to be a traditional retelling.

Perhaps the production team of the insect-and-animal retelling adopts the same cultural script as Disney because there are several similarities between the two adaptations. Similar to Disney's father, the butterfly father is a cripple. But, he does not have a damaged leg; instead, he has a broken wing, the evidence that he has already served the emperor. After failing to persuade her father not to join the army, the caterpillar Mulan also undergoes a contemplating moment. Through her solo, though it is not clear what her decision is, she expresses her determination that she would do what she must do. Then, she takes her father's armour and plans to leave home without informing her parents. This is the earliest Mulan retelling in which the heroine literally runs away from home, indicating the western individualist value as previously discussed with respect to Disney's animation. Besides Disney's adaptation, Divers' young adult retelling, Dokey's young adult novels, and the insect cartoon all depict Mulan as a runaway heroine, disclosing the fascination with the possibility of a runaway Chinese girl in the western retellings of the Mulan story. Ma's analysis of how Disney's *Mulan* animates teen dreams can be applicable here (137-140). The running away sequence not only drastically departs from the filial meaning embedded in the original ballad but also refashions the story as Mulan's saga of self-discovery, which transforms the story in accordance with western narrative conventions.

The caterpillar Mulan is also similar to Disney's heroine in the way that she joins the army with a family company, a male companion, who gives her a temporary name during her cross-dressing disguise. Yi-Wu, the old family servant, suggests "Hu-A" as the name for her masculine disguise because "Mulan" in Chinese means magnolia flower and "Hua" is the pronunciation for flower in Chinese. By splitting the English pinyin spelling from "Hua" to "Hu-A," Mulan gains a new name, which has the same meaning as her original one. Thus named with a variant of her given name by a patriarchal figure, Mulan is safely

guarded and controlled by patriarchal laws. However, different from Disney's dragon, Mushu, who closely guards the heroine's gender identity and safety during the whole journey, Yi-Wu, the family servant, seems to disappear from the scene once they reach the battlefield. He leaves the heroine to display her talents and experience her cross-dressing adventure. Having no real patriarchal figure to accompany the heroine on the masculine battlefield does not mean that the patriarchal system will be more easily overturned by the cross-dressing heroine; instead, casting her with a feminine name can metaphorically mean that she is still confined within patriarchy and its stability is safely guaranteed.

Besides the unusual cast, another striking difference this cartoon retelling makes is that a woman is actually allowed to join the war, albeit in the lesser capacity of a scout. Qing-Qing the dragonfly is a female scout in Mulan's army, and she is represented as a traditional girl who believes romance is the most important thing in life. Trapped by the imperial scout, with whom Qing-Qing believes she has fallen in love, Qing-Qing inadvertently puts Mulan's life in danger. The imperial scout plans to take Mulan to the conqueror Mala Khan in order to revenge himself on the emperor because he believes the emperor has mistreated him. Struggling to escape from the clutches of the imperial scout, the caterpillar Mulan falls from high in the sky and luckily lands on a tree, where she undergoes the natural process of metamorphosis.

In the cartoon the caterpillar-and-butterfly army collapses like a landslide during Mulan's absence. Mala Khan and his army drive straight on to the imperial palace and set fire to every building in the palace precinct, and so the symbol of patriarchy and feudalism is drastically burned, symbolizing the collapse of old Chinese systems. Once again the rescue can only come from a western-minded heroine. While most of the Mulan retellings set the battlefield only on the borders, Disney's adaptation, the insect retelling, the next cartoon retelling as well (all retold by westerners) extend the war zone to the imperial palace. The obsession in setting the battlefield in the Chinese palace in these western retellings not only reveals a western eagerness to conquer old Chinese systems, but also to some extent satisfies western curiosity about China and the symbol of Chineseness.

The Secret of Mulan also echoes western narrative or Hollywood movies in its preference to set the final/crucial battle in a highly dangerous place, such as the roof of imperial palace in Disney's *Mulan*, the suspension bridge in *Mulan II* and *Kung Fu Panda*, and now in this cartoon retelling a castle on top of a mountain, which has a suspension bridge as the only road to the outside world. *The Secret of Mulan* has literally retold the Chinese story based on western narrative. In the film, Qing-Qing has finally found Mulan,

who has already transformed from a caterpillar to a butterfly, and takes Mulan in time to the battlefield. The motif of metamorphosis signifies the growth of Mulan, echoing the self-discovering motif in western narrative. Moreover, while her people believe she is dead, her coming back also reflects the revival motif, a recurring theme in western literature. Her absence can also highlight the importance of her role, the individualist value, in defeating the enemy. She will come back as saviour of the whole country. Once again she arrives at the battlefield, but this time with both her gender and butterfly identities in disguise. In the cartoon, the disguised identities become her secret weapon and also the key to vanquish the invader, Mala Khan.

The last battle in the cartoon not surprisingly becomes the individual triumph of the western-minded Mulan; however, her one-to-one combat with Mala Khan is paralleled with a fight between Qing-Qing and the traitorous imperial scout. While Mulan and Qing-Qing are constructed as small and weak, Mala Khan and the imperial scout are represented as big and strong. The difference in size in children's literature often signals the power hierarchy, and the small defeating the big always carries a strong pedagogical meaning. In the cartoon, the parallel combats are not only the war between small/weak and big/strong, but also the war between women and men. While Qing-Qing cunningly lures the imperial scout to a waterfall where a frog terminates his life, Mulan takes off her armour at the critical moment and strategically lures Mala Khan to the mountains where he is finally captured. Mulan and Qing-Qing are physically much inferior to their enemies, but through combining their wisdom and strength, they can overturn the situation and achieve feats as males do on the battlefield. Furthermore, the butterfly Mulan, like Disney's heroine, saves the whole country as a woman, rather than as a disguised male warrior. Saving the whole country as a woman, as her true self, can prove what this rebellious and headstrong girl insists at the outset that she is right to behave in her own way. By following her own path, a western path, she not only accomplishes the mission of defeating the intruders but also finds a husband—the Prince, suggesting that she is the winner in the contest with her elder sister, a metonym of Chinese femininity. *The Secret of Mulan* ends with a strong sense of romance. When Mulan and the Prince, two butterflies, fly high hand in hand over their land, it indicates Mulan's journey of self-discovery has reached its end. The numerous similarities between *The Secret of Mulan* and Disney's adaptation probably reflect a western mentality that refashions a Chinese story into an Americanized story.

Song Nan Zhang's animated retelling of the Mulan story is the reproduction of his 1998 diasporic picture book; it lasts only seven minutes. The DVD combines Zhang's

Mulan retelling with Aaron Shepard's retelling of *Lady White Snake*, another famous Chinese story, in which a female snake pays a debt of gratitude to a male mortal. Zhang and Shepard's animated retellings are part of Pan Asian's Endeavours in Chinese stories series; each DVD in the series encompasses two stories, dialogues in both English and Mandarin, and subtitles in English, simplified Chinese, traditional Chinese, and Hanyu Pinyin, denoting its target a variety of readership. As Zhang's animation is the duplication of his picture book retelling, how diasporic culture, Chinese culture and the heroine are constructed has been discussed in the previous chapter and therefore will not be discussed again here. However, the release of the diasporic DVD signifies the endeavours of diasporic people to tell or retell the story from their cultural origins in the multi-modal form as a counter to Disney's mighty product.

The next animated cartoon, *Mulan*, is produced by Australian Burbank Animation in 1998. It opens with the Chinese characters "Mu Lan" written vaguely in calligraphy at the background and Mulan practicing martial arts in the front, together with Chinese music with strong drum beats, giving an impression of Chineseness. Without major modifications, the storyline is similar to that of the most common and traditional retellings produced from Chinese and Sinophone regions; however, there are still some minor differences which manifest the ideology underpinning the story and might be worth exploring.

Firstly, the audience of the cartoon is constantly aware of the confined position of the heroine because her story is constructed from the points of view of three male figures: her father, her martial arts mentor, and her future husband. They construct her story and guide her to her destiny. Right after the title page, Mulan comes alive from her father's calligraphy painting with her father narrating "Mulan, my daughter, you make an old man so proud." The cartoon presents her father sitting on a hill, back toward the audience, watching his daughter practice Kung fu and drawing a picture of her. Visually, Mulan is represented from her father's point of view, symbolizing the power hierarchy between father and daughter. The father's compliment on Mulan's making an old man so proud suggests an ambiguity that she might behave either according to social regulations or away from such social regulations.

Another male voice which constantly appears is from Mulan's Kung fu mentor, the mystical Zi Hou, who always shows up as a guide at the most critical moments. While Mulan is wondering why a girl cannot join the army and why she has to "be a boy, and [has] to grow up to be a hairy man, strange smell and deep voice" in order to be a qualified soldier, the mentor appears assuring her that she can be equal to any male soldiers in China

and that it is her destiny to join the war in her father's place. Before she really challenges patriarchy, the mentor shows up in time to "guide" her the right way, which superficially solves her dilemma and in reality maintains the stability of patriarchy. Also, when Mulan is caught by three bandits and when she is pondering on a war plan, the mentor is always a great inspiration. He is the person who teaches her and guides her during the cross-dressing journey. By presenting the mentor as a constant consultant, the animated cartoon represents Mulan as a heroine who tends to rely on a dominant male figure, which ironically suggests that she is less capable and independent and that the potential for the heroine to behave in a way beyond social norms has been greatly diminished.

The last voice which constructs the heroine's story is from a male soldier, called Liu Gang, a friend Mulan makes on her way to the battlefield. As Liu can write and read, he claims that he will write down their adventures, and he really does. Through the letters to his parents, Mulan is often mentioned, hence constructed, from his point of view. As he puts it, "although he is small, he can fight," and "[h]e is not like any other soldiers. I know one day Mulan will be a leader." And her story continues as he predicts. The cartoon retelling closes with Mulan and Liu mounted on horses standing together on top of a hill with Liu's voice narrating the content of his family letter, "P.S. beloved parents, I want my friend, Mulan. This is very complicated." The strong sense of romance implies that again marriage is the reward for her "behaved" performance on the battlefield. As the story is told by Liu, Mulan becomes the object constructed in *his* story, rather than an agentic subject in her own story. The double effect of representing Mulan from the perspective of male others and of situating her as part of someone else's story thus limits attribution to her of freedom of action and agency.

Another noticeable change in the cartoon, similar to that in Disney's *Mulan*, is the makeover scene, in which is no Mulan but by Liu Gang who undergoes the gender-switching makeover. During the military campaign, on one occasion Mulan and Liu are sent to spy on the enemy, a recurring theme in some Mulan retellings. However, this time both of them cross-dress as women in order to gain access to the enemy camp. Liu's attempt to impersonate a woman is hilarious: his makeup is exaggerated with a big red mouth and an angular face, which echoes the impersonation of the three soldiers in Disney's version. Following Mulan's instruction, Liu falls down when he tries to walk like a woman, and his voice sounds terrible when he attempts to speak in a feminine way. When they arrive at the enemy's camp, one soldier touches his bottom. He angrily stares at the soldier. The scene of sexual harassment brings an ironical and humorous effect as the

soldier does not sexually harasses the real woman, Mulan, but the cross-dressing man, Liu. Similar to the three soldiers in Disney's *Mulan*, Liu is incapable of giving an authentic performance of femininity, and his impersonation is presented in a comedic way. As Flanagan observes, "[t]he male cross-dressing paradigm deliberately constructs male cross-dressing as comic through the masculine subject's inability to disguise himself effectively as a female, proceeding to use this failure as a confirmation of the superiority and indestructibility of his inherent masculinity" (54). The sharp contrast between Mulan's competent performance of masculinity and Liu's awkward performance of femininity in the cartoon reinforces gender hierarchy that masculinity is superior. The male impersonation will be further discussed in next chapter.

Although the cartoon version tries to present the story as authentically as possible, there are still some clues disclosing that it is made from a western perspective. As mentioned earlier, this retelling also depicts how the invading enemy drives straight on to the imperial palace. Perhaps it is tempting for westerners to set the battlefield in the imperial palace, the icon of China. Moreover, in the animated cartoon, the Chinese army on the borders is literally wiped out, the same theme also occurring in Divers' Belgium young adult novel. While the Mulan retellings from Chinese and Sinophone regions never depict the Chinese army as eradicated nor the imperial palace overrun by the enemy, the retellings produced by westerners seem to favor these kinds of motifs. Probably the weakness of the Chinese army in the late Qing Dynasty has impressed itself too much on the minds of westerners. Also, following the latest western adaptations, *Mulan* also highlights the importance of honour. As the cover blurb of the VHS edition puts it, Mulan's father considers his incapability to respond to the imperial order as a family disgrace, and Mulan takes his place because she is aware of his main concern. While in Chinese retellings family honour is a minor reason for the heroine to join the war, and it is not even mentioned in the Ballad, the western adaptations tend to reinforce the importance of honour and make it the main cause that drives the heroine to join the army. The cartoon retelling's emphasis on honour is, in Ma's terms again, "[a]nother manifestation of the constricted repertoire of Orientalism" (131). Finally, the most bizarre point about this animated cartoon is the dubbing of the characters: they speak with strong accents by pronouncing every syllable of a word with stress. This is by no means a Chinese accent, but an accent the production team apparently assumes is characteristic of Chinese speech patterns — further evidence that the retelling is constructed based on western imaginary Orientalism about China and Chinese.

Similar to Burbank's animated cartoon, Springboard's *The Legend of Mulan* is dubbed with voices which have presumably Chinese accents, revealing it is made by non-Chinese. Besides the weird accents, *The Legend of Mulan* has made some "bizarre" modifications, disclosing that this animated cartoon is created based on imaginary Orientalism. First of all, the cartoon opens with pavilions, towers and buildings which exhibit Chineseness, but the shop signs on shopping streets are written in Japanese. For the eyes of westerner, eastern cultures are all the same; there is no cultural difference among various countries. Second, Mulan has an animal friend — a panda — denoting that the setting is China. In the cartoon, Mulan reads a story from a Chinese story book about how and where pandas come from to her panda friend, but the story she reads is totally different from the Chinese text in the Chinese story book. While she is reading out loud that panda's ancestors are black bears and white bears, the Chinese text consists of some Chinese characters which do not really convey any meaning. Also, similar to some western Mulan retellings, China is represented as a mysterious country, in which people use magic. There are a lot of clues divulging that the constructions of China and the Chinese heroine come from imaginary Orientalism.

Springboard's Mulan retelling has also made some modifications to the storyline which have the effect of rendering gender issues as unimportant. In the cartoon, Mulan joins the army to fight against marauding hordes, who blame the prolonged drought in China upon the emperor and claim to take his throne. Superficially, Mulan joins the war in order to regain peace in China; however, her real mission is to wake up the dragon on top of the Himalaya Mountains because the sleeping dragon no longer melts the snow and that is the real reason the drought occurs. With the help of a magic family totem, a pattern consisting of Yin and Yang, Mulan passes the trials from nature—falling down to a burning lake, almost being drowned in the water, landing on an ice desert — and finally achieves the mission. Because the film describes the journey to the mountains as her personal performance, there is no need for her to disguise her gender identity. Also, after she cross-dresses she is represented visually more as a female general than a cross-dressing soldier, so that viewers will easily identify her as a female. Through these reworkings of the story, the gender issue has been played down. By weakening the importance of masculinity, the animated cartoon constructs Mulan as a capable female who is able to accomplish an unusual mission alone; however, it is actually the magic power which enables Mulan to get away from dangerous places and which really accomplishes the mission in the film. That is to say, Mulan seldom solves the dilemma on her own. Also, the magic totem is given by Mulan's father so that it symbolizes power from patriarchy. With

the help of patriarchy, Mulan is depicted as capable; without it, she might not be able to fulfill the mission. Although the addition of the magic family totem is to satisfy the imagination of western audiences, it regulates the heroine and restricts any impression that her achievement is due to her ability.

Conclusion

The target audience of the animation determines gender performance of the heroine and the representation of China. With the exception of Song Nan Zhang's animation, which manifests gender fluidity (as discussed in the previous chapter), gender representation in the other five animated retellings is somewhat conventional. Mulan is either westernized or performs Chinese femininity according to imaginary Orientalist viewpoints. In most of the animations, the heroine is represented as a seemingly rebellious but in reality traditional heroine. She has crossed cultural and geopolitical boundaries, but unfortunately, as argued above, she has crossed from the Eastern patriarchy to the Western patriarchy. Perhaps it is due to the consideration of gross profit that the animation companies are unable to produce a feminist version of the Mulan story or to create a retelling which challenges the polarized gender categories. Often to produce an animation is costly so the popularity with the target customers is the priority of animation companies. So, setting the story in an imaginary Oriental world with a western-minded heroine who will save China and solve the problem for Chinese people is the guarantee of a box office success.

Chapter Six

Towards A Hybrid and Modern Heroine: Mulan in Television Series and the Latest Film

Introduction

Since the release of Disney's animation, the circulation of the Mulan story has entered a global era. Not only has the retelling been marketed globally, but also the production of the retelling has been globalized, particularly when the new product aims at a global audience. Following Disney's mode, whose production team consists of artists from different cultures, the latest released Chinese film *Hua Mulan* casts actors from China, Korea, America and Russia. Chinese top actor Zhao Vicki Wei, who played a cross-dressing spy in the earlier Chinese film *Red Cliff*, is cast as the legendary heroine. Russian pop singer Vitaliy Vladasovich Grachyov, well known by his stage name Vitas, plays a foreign hostage singer, while Nicky Lee, a Korean American singer, acts as a villain in the new release. In his book *Sinascape: Contemporary Chinese Cinema*, Gary G. Xu points out that Chinese cinema is one of the most important aspects of China's rise. By drawing attention to the changes of the mode of film production in the twenty-first century, Xu perceives "contemporary Chinese cinema as an inherently transnational network" (4). Indeed, the production of contemporary Chinese cinema has entered a transnational age, which is fuelled by the ambition for global fame and gain. The Hong Kong film director Ma Jingle openly admits that the employment of non-Chinese actors is prompted by the desire to attract a global market.[65] After almost four years of preparation, *Hua Mulan* was launched on the big screen at the end of 2009. The film marks not only a new interpretation of the thousand-year-old legend by people who have Chinese cultural backgrounds but also the intention of the Chinese and Sinophone film industry to introduce a Chinese-made Mulan story, in comparison with Disney's adaptation, to the global world.[66]

Because of its tremendous success in the global market, Disney's *Mulan*, the American-made retelling, has usurped many retellings about the heroine from the Chinese

[65]"The Competition of *Hua Mulan*: Will China Defeat Disney?" *China Review News*. 9, Dec, 2009 http://www.chinareviewnews.com/doc/1011/6/1/4/101161479.html?coluid=59&kindid=0&docid=101161479 access 24 May 2010.

[66] According to UDN News, a new Mulan movie, aiming the global market, began filming last autumn in China. The film is produced by Chinese film star Zhang Ziyi, produced by Jan de Bont and starring Zhang as Mulan. The production will incorporate people from global world, and the film will be dubbed in English. "Transnational Producing of Hua Mulan, Zhang Ziyi as the Film Maker." *UDN News* 9, September 2010 http://udn.com/NEWS/ENTERTAINMENT/ENT2/5837812.shtml access 4 October 2011.

and Sinophone regions and become the most representative and recognizable Mulan story in the world. Chinese people, on the one hand, are resigned to the fact that it is because of the Disney retelling that the Chinese heroine has been brought to the world-wide stage. But, on the other hand, they often question why the Chinese entertainment industry is not able to disseminate a Chinese-made retelling to the world. This is how the idea of reproducing Mulan's story aiming at a global audience came to the mind of the production team of the latest *Hua Mulan*.[67] It is to be expected Ma Jingle's *Hua Mulan* would be very different from Disney's adaptation, given that the Disney retelling has obviously been Americanized.

Ma's *Hua Mulan* undeniably differs from Disney's adaptation in many aspects; however, Ma curiously duplicates the running-away sequence in his film. The running-away sequence, first appearing in Disney's and the animal-cast retellings, signifies the invention and modification by the West to the Chinese story. As argued in the previous chapter, the running-away sequence drastically departs from the filial deeds embedded in the original ballad and it literally makes the heroine more heroic, individualist and thus more westernized. The running-away sequence is a mark of westernization of the Mulan retelling. It is mysterious that Ma adopts a westernized sequence in his film when Chinese want to claim ownership of the story. In fact, Ma's film is not the only retelling from the Chinese and Sinophone regions adopting the running-away sequence. The sequence also appears in the 1999 Taiwanese TV series *Hua Mulan*, a retelling which is significantly affected by Disney's version of the heroine's story. One of the possible reasons why the running-away sequence has become common in the latest retellings is that a running-away heroine is attributed with a higher level of subjective agency and an agentic female has more appeal to popular taste nowadays. Hence, it is arguable that the transformations of Mulan in the latest retellings not only denote the taste of the public but also indicate Mulan has been transformed towards a hybrid and modern heroine in the global world.

In this chapter, three retellings (see Appendix Six) will be discussed: two television series and one film adaptation. Although television series and films are different genres, they are performed by real people in multi-modal system form and they are both commercially oriented. Because of considerations of production cost and economic benefits, the production teams of television series and film are often sensitive to popular moods and careful to invest in products which are likely to attract the largest conceivable

[67] See note one.

audiences. The three retellings in this chapter are all produced in the Chinese and Sinophone regions between 1995 and 2009. They differ from the multi-modal form of the Mulan retellings included in Chapter Two, which also emanate from the same regions, in the way that the three retellings all adopt a co-production mode: the two television series combine workforce from different areas of the large Chinese and Sinophone region, and the latest film brings together a workforce from different parts of the global world. Although the three retellings share a similar co-production mode, the images of the cross-dressing heroine they present are by no means the same, which reveals the various interpretations of the Mulan story by different production teams and also implicitly manifests that the transformation of Mulan has a relation to rapidly-changing popular taste.

The first television series, *Talented Elite under the Sun: Mulan* (天地奇英：木蘭), was broadcast on Taiwan's TTV in 1995. It is shot in China and casts actors from Taiwan and China although the main characters and the majority of production team are from Taiwan. It is typical of the television series co-produced by companies from both sides of the Taiwan Straits in the mid 1990s, a time when Taiwanese companies played the leading role in co-producing TV series.[68] The second TV series, *Hua Mulan*, is also shot in China and casts actors from Hong Kong, China, and Taiwan while the majority of the production team is from Taiwan. The well-known Hong Kong actor Yuan Anita Yongyi plays the legendary Mulan, and the Chinese martial artist Zhao Vincent Wenzhuo is cast as Mulan's soul-mate, who later becomes her husband in the second part of the series. *Hua Mulan* is produced by Taiwanese TV series producer Yang Pei-Pei, famous for producing Wuxia dramas. Yang has received numerous awards for her Wuxia TV series, and some of her most well-known works are the adaptations of Jin Yong's[69] Wuxia novels. Unlike the other Mulan retellings, Yang adopts an unprecedentedly humorous tone in her Mulan adaptation, which had very high audience ratings when it was on air in Taiwan in 1999, and its DVD has been sold in many countries. The last retelling is Ma Jingle's film adaptation, a film full of grief and tragic sentiment. The three retellings, each focusing on different themes, clearly show that the gender representation of the cross-dressing heroine and the story itself can be interpreted and constructed in distinctly different ways.

Due to diverse emphases on themes, the three retellings attribute Mulan with different

[68] Lai, Yi-Xuan. "State, Terrestrial TV Stations and Cultural Entrepreneurs: The Beginning of Transnational Production of Taiwanese TV Dramas (1989-1992)." *Mass Communication Research* 107 (April, 2011): 133-172.

[69] Jin Yong is the pen name of Zha Liangyong. He is the most famous Chinese Wuxia novelist. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jin_Yong access 26 May 2010.

levels of subjective agency, and the gender performance Mulan has in the three retellings can be generally classified as traditional femininity, modern femininity, and suppressed femininity, respectively. Mainly looking at the heroine's gender performance, this chapter will also explore the reasons why the heroine and her story are presented so differently in little more than a decade, from 1995 to 2009. The Mulan retellings from the same period usually reflect similar mentalities and tend to highlight the same themes, such as filial piety, loyalty, patriotism, or gender equality, but the main themes of the three multi-modal retellings vary from one another considerably. Could the differences among the three retellings signify the different degrees they respond to contemporary thoughts, such as feminism, democracy and globalization? Or is it possible that the dissimilarities are due to their various target audiences? Furthermore, the discussion will also include analysis of gender performance of Mulan's soul mate, Li Liang, in Yang's TV series. In Yang's depiction, Li Liang is constructed as a humorous, manly, sensitive and caring man, a role model for modern men. For different reasons, Li Liang impersonates a woman three times in the retelling; he is absolutely not the same as any of his counterparts in the other Mulan retellings. Under Yang's construction, Li and Mulan are a perfect modern couple and Mulan is highly agentic. However, the comedic effect of Li's impersonation greatly diminishes the possibility that Yang's adaptation could be read as a feminist interpretation of the Mulan story.

Traditional Femininity and Traditional Virtues in the 1995 TV Series

The 1995 TV series, like most of the previous Mulan retellings, is a traditional one. It reinforces not only the Confucian doctrine of filial piety and loyalty but also the traditional female virtue of chastity. As discussed in Chapter Three, chastity became the core female virtue in late imperial China and the emphasis on chastity in the Mulan retellings did not exist until the Ming Dynasty. Due to the focus on the old traditional virtues, the heroine in the 1995 TV series is considerably restricted from being emancipated. As what happens in most of the traditional Mulan retellings, she is depicted as the best martial arts fighter, indicating her capability of performing distinctive masculinity, and not surprisingly when she intends to perform femininity it is either suppressed or strictly follows the regulation of traditional social norms on women. What makes the TV series different from the other traditional retellings is that Mulan's cross-dressing performance mostly takes place outside the army, and this in consequence allows her to perform femininity, albeit a traditional femininity, during her unusual journey. Furthermore, the 1995 TV series is not really a

story about how the cross-dressing heroine joins the battlefield but more like a story dealing with several love triangles. When the theme of the story shifts from defending borders to romantic love, it is explicit that the retelling is once again informed by patriarchal ideology and it is very unlikely for the heroine to acquire a high level of subjective agency. Because the themes of filial piety and loyalty in the TV series are presented in a similar way as those in some of the previous retellings, the following discussion will focus only on the heroine's gender performance and the reinforcement of chastity.

The series begins with Mulan intervening to prevent two village youths, who later become her loyal comrades, from killing a little deer in the woods. In the first episode, while she tries to save the life of the deer from the two hunters, she demonstrates both distinctive masculinity through her martial skills and traditional femininity through her tender feeling towards the little deer. This combination of excellent martial skills with sympathy towards the weak foretells that she is a qualified warrior with benevolent virtue. However, it is also noteworthy that Mulan's sympathetic feeling towards the little deer is mocked by the youths as they consider it as "female benevolence" (婦人之仁), a negative term used to assert that women show sympathy when it is unnecessary. The following episodes, conventionally, include the recruitment of the imperial army, disturbance in the Hua family, Mulan's defeating her ageing father in martial arts under male disguise, and the father's permission for her to join the army in his place. However, Mulan does not join the war alone. In some of the previous retellings, Mulan joins the army with a companion, but in the series she goes to the battlefield unprecedentedly with four men from her village: the two hunters, her brother-in-law, and her playmate since childhood. Although Mulan is depicted as the best fighter in the series, it is not until Mulan's elder brother-in-law and the other male companions, who are apparently inferior to her in martial arts, assure her safety that her father gives his approval. It is clear that what the male companions assure is not the safety of her life but the safety of her secret, or in another words, her chastity.

Although crossing gender boundaries may lead to severe punishment, usually death, in a patriarchal society, the death penalty due to violating gender norms is only hinted in the Mulan retellings produced from the Chinese and Sinophone regions. Always the cross-dressing heroine is rewarded because of her outstanding military exploits at the end of the story, and her cross-dressing performance usually arouses praise and admiration from the public. With great martial skills, Mulan is unlikely to be killed on the battlefield.

What her father considers is her chastity, or the reputation of women (名節) in Chinese expression. Also, Mulan's mother and sister keep telling her to act cautiously among male soldiers as if the male soldiers from Mulan's camp are more dangerous than the enemy Mulan is going to confront on the battlefield. Their worry signifies that the exposure of her gender identity is much worse than being killed in battle. If her gender identity is revealed before she achieves military exploits, she dishonors both herself and the whole family. A single young woman living with male soldiers in the army, a traditional male defined sphere, is disgraceful and unacceptable in a traditional society unless she keeps her secret safely until the end of the mission. However, the assurance that her secret will be safe not merely means the security of her chastity. More importantly, the assurance by male companions to some extent imposes a restriction on Mulan's cross-dressing performance and therefore guarantees the stability of the patriarchal system. That is to say, Mulan has to be kept under "surveillance" while she is disguised as a man in order to make sure the whole patriarchal system is secure. What her male companions assure seemingly is her safety but in reality is the stability of patriarchy. As it has often been remarked, the violation of daily repetitious gender performance indicates a rebellion against patriarchal regulations and consequently signifies a possibility of emancipation for the cross-dressing heroine. However, being watched by patriarchal figures, not just one but four, denotes the multiple difficulties in obtaining a high level of subjective agency for the heroine.

Furthermore, Mulan has constantly been reminded that marriage is the destiny for all women and that marriage is protection for women during her cross-dressing adventure, and which also sets up a barrier for her to be emancipated. In the TV series Mulan's playmate, Hua Ming, proposes marriage to her the day before they fight a decisive battle as he believes that this is the only way to protect her. Fighting together with her fiancé/husband on the battlefield, although as a cross-dressing soldier, can ensure that her cross-dressing performance is temporary and that she will return to the submissive role her society expects her to be once the war is finished. Fighting with her fiancé/husband also signifies the security of her chastity. It is explicit that what Hua Ming wants to protect is her chastity, the reputation of a woman. Mulan turns down his marriage proposal as she insists that the safety of the country comes before one's marriage. Sacrificing the individual's own benefit, such as the desire for marriage and love, in favor of the country's benefit continues to be the main theme as the series unfolds. Hua Ming dies soon after the decisive battle because of the treachery of a betrayer from Mulan's camp. The death of Hua Ming not only

highlights the cruelty of war but also solves the dilemma of a love triangle for Mulan. The death of one person in a love triangle relationship is a clichéd strategy to solve the problem for the main character in popular culture, and this has appeared several times in the Mulan retellings. Following Hua Ming, another character named Hu Li plays the major role in drawing Mulan back to the traditional role.

Like Mulan, Hu Li is a cross-dressing heroine, although she joins the battlefield for a very different reason: to find hidden treasure which is said to be buried on the border of the two army camps. After discovering each other's gender identity, Hu and Mulan become good friends. Unlike Mulan, who never utters her feelings about cross-dressing as a man, Hu constantly asserts that the price for crossing gender boundaries is unbearable and that the destiny for women is marriage:

> No matter how well you do it, how capable you are
> (其實你做得再好，再怎麼逞能)
> You and I after all are women.
> (畢竟你我都是女人)
> We need to give vent to our emotion.
> (我們的情感是需要發洩)
> We need support.
> (更需要依靠的)
> …..
> Whenever I put on armour mingling with men,
> (當我穿上軍袍和男人混在一起的時候)
> The stronger I wanted to be, the weaker I found myself.
> (我想越想表現得堅強，越是發覺自己的軟弱)
> …..
> This kind of life, I cannot bear anymore.
> (這樣的日子，我再也熬不下去了)
> …..
> Women need to seek support from men.
> (女人需要找一個依靠的男人)　　Hu Li

Hu's utterance reinforces the patriarchal ideas that women should be dependant on men and that marriage is the destiny for all women. Moreover, Hu's confession also denotes that violating patriarchal norms brings great mental suffering to the cross-dressing heroines. Compared to Mulan's silence about the pain stemming from cross-dressing, Hu's "complaint" also helps construct Mulan as someone who can bear the intolerability others cannot bear and who is therefore worthy of the reward, marriage, at the end. Functioning as a contrast to Mulan, Hu is also trapped in the relationship of a love triangle and she once even desires love from both men, strongly violating the regulations on chastity for women in patriarchal China. Hu dies before the series closes. She has to die in the end because she has transgressed too much and what she desires is beyond the tolerance of patriarchy. In the 1995 TV series, chastity usurps the other virtues, such as filial piety and loyalty, and becomes the main merit that the heroine has to perform.

With several modifications, the 1995 TV series reconstructs the Mulan story as a cross-dressing adventure in which the heroine's chastity is put to the test. Mulan is given a secret mission to find out the betrayer in her country after they defeated the enemy. She is unfortunately injured on the way and her male comrade, Li Jun, saves her life and finds out her secret. Li is depicted as a young man who is loyal, virtuous, and sincere, and he is the destined man for Mulan. After learning that Mulan has joined the army for her father's sake and aware of the importance of chastity to women, Li decides not to reveal he is the person who has saved her. While Mulan continues to perform as a male, she suspects that Li is the person who saved her life and he might already know her secret. Mulan suffers greatly because of the possibility of losing her chastity. After a sleepless night, she decides:

> If it is necessary, I shall marry him in order to preserve my reputation.
> (若是有必要，我只能嫁給對方來保全我的名節了)

In patriarchal China, a woman is allowed to reveal her body only to her husband; otherwise, she will be considered an unchaste woman. If the body of an unmarried woman has been revealed to a man, the best solution for her to keep the integrity of her chastity is to marry him. The practice of conservative culture may sound very weird to the ears of a modern audience, but it strictly regulates gender performance of people in a patriarchal society and the consequences of violating the regulations may result in punishment by death or a lot of mental suffering as in Mulan's case.

In the 1995 TV series, gender construction of Mulan is very traditional and brings no potential for the cross-dressing heroine to destabilize normative gender categories. Mulan's capability to perform distinctive masculinity is manifested only through her martial skills. The way she behaves and her speaking voice both denote that she is female. She is represented not only mentally but also physically as a female even when she is disguised as a man. When she cross-dresses as a male soldier, only one change occurs in her visual presentation: the male clothes. The visual effect clearly presents her as a female putting on male clothes. Unlike other male companions, who all tie their hair up, Mulan has her hair on her temples hang down, a sign of femininity. Although her long hair is no longer revealed under her hat, her eyebrows, her lips, and the way of make-up all conform to the notions of traditional femininity. Furthermore, retrieving femininity is also presented as an irresistible temptation to the cross-dressing heroine. During her recuperation, she stays at Hu Li's place and has the chance to see cosmetics, something she has been yearning after for a long time. Unselfconsciously, she lets her hair down and dances merrily. Her gaiety symbolizes that traditional femininity is what she is destined for and what she really desires to perform. Due to her loyalty in performing the role her society wants her to be, she is also destined to be rewarded by patriarchy. The series closes with a scene in which she and Li Jun walk up onto a bridge hand in hand, strongly suggesting that marriage will soon follow. In the 1995 Taiwanese TV series, the construction of the Mulan retelling once again reflects the thousand-year-old ideology about the normative gender stereotypes and hence the realization of obtaining subjective agency has been considerably restricted for the cross-dressing heroine.

A Modern Heroine and Hybrid Cultures in the 1999 TV Series

Apart from reproducing the storyline that Mulan disguises herself as a man and joins the army in her father's place, the 1999 TV series is greatly different from all other Mulan retellings. Not only are traditional virtues not important anymore but also the overall tone of the TV series is unprecedentedly humorous. In Wu Xiang-Zhi's *Yang Pei-Pei's TV Series Collection: Hua Mulan* (1999) the production team declared that they have imparted a modern and feminist meaning to the thousand-year-old story. Yang Pei-Pei, the TV series producer, originally believed that the story of Mulan was too old to be adopted as a TV series, but after watching Disney's adaptation she changed her mind. Yang replaces the Western Mushu Dragon with the Chinese domestic god of the fireplace, or the Kitchen God

(灶神) to create humorous atmosphere in the series. Also, she invents a plot about Mulan's married life in order to construct her as a heroine in a modern context (Wu, Preface). In the second half of the series, Mulan marries her soul-mate, General Li Liang, and afterwards she experiences serious conflicts with her mother-in-law and is constantly struggling to find a balance between professional life and marriage. Generally speaking, the series is about a "modern" heroine self-consciously and actively seeking to undertake a cross-dressing adventure, to reconstruct a new image for females, and to rebuild gender relations in a modern Mulan retelling.

Yang's retelling of the Mulan story is a rare example in that the reproduction of the Chinese heroine's story is considerably influenced by the western adaptation of the same Chinese story, reflecting the phenomenon of mutual influences between different cultures in the global era. The series manifest a feature of mixed cultures, not only cultures of the East and the West but also cultures of tradition and modernity. The following discussion, focusing on representations of the three main characters, the Kitchen God, Mulan, and Li Liang, will explore how different cultures, including eastern, western, traditional and modern, function to reshape the Mulan story, and whether the modern Mulan heroine successfully destabilizes the normative gender boundaries.

The Impact of Disney: Representation of the Comedic Chinese Kitchen God

Strictly speaking, the impact of Disney's Mulan adaptation on the 1999 TV series can be manifested in the overall humorous tone and the image constructions of three characters: the Kitchen God, Mulan, and her ageing father; however, the most obvious Disney influence is on the representation of the Kitchen God, named Ji-Li (吉利), literally meaning luck. Although the 1999 TV series is a story about an unusual journey for a cross-dressing heroine, it can also be regarded as a competition between women and men. To put it more precisely, it is a bet between the Jade Emperor (玉皇大帝)[70] and the Queen Mother of the West (王母娘娘 or 西王母) over the achievements of the cross-dressing heroine. According to Suzanne Cahill, the Queen Mother of the West is considered to be "the embodiment of the ultimate yin, the dark female force" (1993:3), and she is also "the highest female deity in the pantheon of the Taoist religion" (1986:155). Furthermore, she is the protector of non-conformist female:

[70] The Jade Emperor is the ruler of heaven, human world and the hell in Taoist mythology.

> Hsi Wang Mu acted as patron deity for all women in Taoism, but she was the special guardian of singing girls, dead women, novices, nuns, adepts, and priestesses. These people stand outside the roles prescribed for women in the traditional Chinese family—the dutiful daughter, obedient wife, and self-sacrificing mother. Women under the goddess's special protection acted outside the context of the family. (1986:155)

Non-conformist and anti-traditional as Mulan is, she is unquestionably under the special protection of the Queen Mother of the West, who ends up saving her life several times during her cross-dressing adventure in the 1999 series. Unlike the Queen Mother of the West, who praises Mulan for her aspiration and her filial love for her father, the Jade Emperor considers Mulan to be a troublemaker and believes that her act against nature will bring her serious consequences. This is how their bet starts and how the modern Mulan's unconventional journey begins. The disparity between the Queen Mother of the West and the Jade Emperor is later parallel to that between the Chinese Queen and the Chinese Emperor on earth. While both female Queens applaud Mulan for her capacity to be a role model for all women and therefore help Mulan on her way towards success, the two male Emperors, representing the supreme patriarchy, tend to look down upon her ability. Instead of allowing Mulan to develop her own story, the Jade Emperor even puts more obstacles in her way to achieving her goals: he sends the Kitchen God to prevent Mulan from becoming a success as a soldier. However, the Queen Mother of the West coincidentally assigns the Kitchen God to help Mulan. As a result, Mulan's achievement is strongly related to the "competition" between female and male, and her adventure also becomes a trial of morality for the Kitchen God, the inbetweener.

As mentioned earlier, the Kitchen God most obviously manifests the hybrid cultures and the comedic effect in the TV series retelling. Although the Chinese Kitchen God and the Disney Mushu dragon do not visually resemble each other, they do share some similarities in several aspects. They both join the army as a sort of companion of Mulan, and both are the major source of comedic effect in the retellings. Like Mushu, the Kitchen God is optimistic and humorous. His exaggerating facial expressions and comic modes of speaking and behaving duplicate Disney's Mushu dragon, which often brings a comedic effect to the retelling. Besides, the visual representation of the Kitchen God, his long and thick eyebrows in particular, also helps create an amusing effect. Often what he intends to do results in the opposite effect. When he tries to drag Mulan down, he ends up helping her

gain promotion. When he attempts to help her, he on the contrary brings more danger to her. The developing of Mulan's army life against his wish also constructs an entertaining effect. Although he does not like Mulan at the beginning and is trapped within the contradictory missions he has been assigned, he is finally moved by Mulan's sincerity and decides to help her without considering that he might need to pay a heavy price. Like Mushu dragon, he sometimes brings trouble to Mulan but eventually helps her to achieve her goals. As he is named Luck, he is destined to bring luck to Mulan. Inheriting the humorous features from Disney's adaptation, the 1999 TV series tries every means to create a comedic effect and even surpasses its predecessor in bringing more laughter to its audience.

A Hybrid and Modern Heroine: Gender Construction of Mulan

Regardless of the heavy emphasis on traditional values in the original ballad, the 1999 TV series gives the Mulan story a humorous and modern interpretation. It reflects modern ideas of gender performance and democracy, which implicitly occurred in some previous retellings but has been further elaborated in the TV series. The portrayal of the heroine, like the retelling, is unexpected and unparalleled. She is presented as a child unloved by her mother, who values sons much more than daughters, but luckily she has a communicative and modern-style father. In one of the early scenes, she takes off her clothes and has a bath in the river, stupefying the girls who are doing the washing by the river. Compared to these girls, who are performing traditional femininity through daily female chores, Mulan's conduct is a gender heresy. She is represented as rebellious and anti-traditional, that is, as a heroine who has high potential to be agentic and self-assertive.

Like her predecessor in the Disney adaptation, she also experiences failure when subjected to match-making procedures. Following Disney's representation, the whole scene of match-making is also constructed in a hilarious way. The matchmaker in her hometown initially refuses to find a match for Mulan because she is notorious for her heresy and far beyond the social norms of good wives. After taking bribes from Mulan's father, the matchmaker matches Mulan with an aging business man, as old as Mulan's father. The match-making ends with Mulan beating this old man up because he touches her bottom in order to examine her female fertility. It is an old belief that women who have bigger bottoms tend to produce more sons. Mulan's father, although initially shocked by her behaviour, concludes she has done the right thing in beating the shameful man up after he realizes what has happened. Like Disney's father, he is encouraging, supportive, and communicative. The failure of the match-making signifies that she is, as her Disney

counterpart, a social outcast and that her story will unfold in another place.

However, what makes her different and unique is that she does not experience any inner struggle or humiliating feelings like her Disney sister. She just simply does not care about it. When her father is recruited by the imperial army, she is happy to take the chance and make the best of her talents. She steals his draft notice, disguises herself as a man, and leaves home on a rainy night. The 1999 TV series is the first Mulan retelling from the Chinese and Sinophone regions to depict Mulan leaving home without parental permission, which apparently comes from Disney's adaptation. Confidently and happily, Mulan leaves a note behind her when she leaves home:

> Although born as a distressed commodity,[71]
> (身是賠錢貨)
> Aspiration is higher than that of boys.
> (志比男兒高)
> Take my father's place in the army,
> (代父從軍去)
> I will not return home before the victory.
> (不勝不復還)

When Mulan first appears as a male, the TV series constructs the shot from a lower angle, representing her as self-assertive, ambitious and determined. Neither does she sigh like the heroine in the original ballad, nor does she struggle or suffer like most of her counterparts in the retellings. She does not consider joining the army with a disguised gender as a sacrifice; instead, she takes it as a chance to fulfill her dream. As a newcomer in the army, she is unprecedentedly active and curious. She is literally the chattiest soldier in the whole army. Curious and excited about everything, she talks a lot and introduces herself to everyone she meets. Typically, the cross-dressing heroine is told to remain as quiet as possible in case her voice will expose her gender identity. Mulan in the 1999 TV series is eager to make new friends as if a disguised gender identity is not a problem for her at all. There are some noticeable changes in her visual representations when she cross-dresses as a soldier: her long, silky hair has been tied up; her eyebrows are thicker and upward; she

[71] For Chinese people who value male much more than female, daughters in the family are like a distressed commodity. My translation aims to be literally close to the original text rather than grammatically correct.

has less red lipstick on. More importantly, she is around the same height as the other, male soldiers. With the armour, her shoulders become broad and strong, and she appears no less masculine than the male soldiers. She performs outstanding masculinity through her martial skills, war plans, and also through her ability to shoulder responsibility when her subordinate makes mistakes. She demonstrates, as most of the female cross-dressers in literature, the potential to destabilize normative gender categories. The gender performance of Mulan in the 1999 TV series manifests not only the limitation of traditional gender norms but also the possibility of a more liberal and fluid gender identity for the heroine both before and after her cross-dressing.

Before she cross-dresses as a man, she never behaved like a proper girl, and hence her lack of ability to perform traditional femininity was marked. After she disguises herself as a man, she sometimes shows her feminine attributes on the battlefield, particularly when she is with General Li Liang, her soul-mate. The way she behaves does not really change much after she cross-dresses because she does not sacrifice or hide her traditional femininity, which she does not have. The femininity she performs is a modern style of femininity. She is tender, caring, capable, agentic, and self-assertive, attributes which are allowed to be shown by a female in a masculine space, or attributes of a modern career women. The second half of the TV series depicts Mulan as a married career woman, who is often struggling to balance work and family, a typical problem career women face in the modern age. While most of the Mulan retellings close with her triumphal return from the battlefield, the story of the 1999 TV series goes further, situating her in an unprecedented situation: a married female General. After her marriage, Mulan not only retrieves her gender identity but also continues her career as a *female* General. As achieving military exploits is her aspiration, she is not willing to give up her goals for the sake of marriage. Gender is no longer an issue in the retelling; what really counts is her capability. She therefore dresses as a man when she goes to her office in the daytime, and puts on her female clothes when she is at home. She is allowed to switch between male and female performances, manifesting the possibility of gender fluidity. With these significant modifications, Mulan in the TV series is constructed as a hybrid heroine: traditional and modern, Chinese and western, and female and male. Not only does she continue to elaborate traditional Chinese values, such as filial piety and loyalty, in the old Mulan story, she also reveals western features taken from her Disney counterpart. Furthermore, situating Mulan in a modern context, the 1999 TV series provides her with a chance to perform gender fluidity. She has been transforming towards a hybrid and modern heroine.

A Sensitive New Age Guy: Gender Construction of Li Liang

The biggest contribution to gender issues in the 1999 TV series is perhaps that it reshapes gender relations and redefines femininity and masculinity in a modern context. To match with an unprecedented modern Mulan heroine, the portrayal of General Li Liang, Mulan's destined husband, is also unusual and unique. He is represented as a sensitive new age guy, who is considerate, caring, and communicative. His initial meeting with Mulan happens when she is on her way to the army, and Li's money is stolen by a group of children. Having mistaken Li as a slave trader, Mulan fights with him in order to save those children from his hands; however, Mulan is punched on her right eye due to her inferior martial skills. The visual representation of exaggerating bruises over her eye creates a humorous effect as the TV series intends to present their initial meeting in a comedic tone rather than in a violent tone. Compared with the opening "little deer" scene, in which the heroine saves the life of a little deer from two hunters, the "initial encounter" scene in the 1999 TV series also constructs Mulan as a heroine with benevolent virtues. Both of them perform their benevolence towards the weak through the act of rescuing; however, while the 1995 heroine is mocked by the two hunters because of her "female benevolence," the 1999 Mulan manifests the real "female benevolence." Without getting a clear picture of the whole situation, Mulan not only shows sympathy when it is unnecessary but also acts in an impetuous way and thus prevents Li from getting his money back; therefore, the "initial encounter" scene constructs Mulan as benevolent but hasty and reckless. Although the initial encounter seems to be represented in an unusual way, particularly when it happens in a Chinese costume TV drama, it is similar to what is referred to as the 'slap scene' in classic Hollywood films. As Hirofumi Katsuno and Jeffrey Maret observe,

> In classic Hollywood films, when a woman slaps a man, particularly at their initial meeting, this rebuff often foreshadows a future romantic involvement that typically comes to fruition by the end of the picture (see. e.g., *Gone with the Wind*, *The Foreign Correspondent*, *Some Like It Hot*, *Indiana Jones*). The flirtatious slap has largely disappeared from contemporary Hollywood production…. (91-92).

Although the slap scene has become less popular in contemporary Hollywood films, Taiwanese TV series, especially romance TV dramas such as the latest *Defeated Queen* (敗

犬女王), *Next Stop Happiness* (下一站幸福), and *Down with Love* (就想賴著你), are obsessed with creating tension and conflict between the couple at their initial meeting. The fight between Mulan and Li, though comedic, does create a tension and hint at a future romantic involvement between the couple. However, there is also a noteworthy difference in the 1999 Mulan TV series. In most of the dramas, it is usually the male who is slapped or punched. By representing Mulan as the one who gets punched, the TV series constructs a new gender relation, which implicitly denotes the equality between two genders and also puts the image of fragile femininity into question.

Under the TV series' representations, the interaction and gender performances of Mulan and Li are endowed with a modern meaning: they are equally capable and they are each other's destined soul mate. Although Mulan is inferior to Li in martial skills, she is intellectually as competent as he is in the 1999 TV series. She is not inferior to him in deploying the army and planning battles. They are each other's best comrade on the battlefield. Furthermore, their relationship develops rapidly after they forget the old grudges: they share their ideas about the future; they encourage each other when one of them is in a bad mood; they face problems and solve them together. They go traveling when they are tired of the struggles in the imperial palace. Furthermore, when the Chinese Emperor bestows her upon the Prince, they decide to elope as they value love more than life. The eloping motif here signifies both the rupture with conservative Chinese culture and the emphasis on freedom and democracy. They are a modern couple, and they are each other's soul mate. The motif of representing Mulan and Li as soul mates is apparently a western and modern influence. There are some Mulan retellings from the Chinese and Sinophone regions depicting Mulan's future husband as her most important comrade, but he has never been her soul mate; also, the details about how the couple interacts are greatly missing in these retellings. In the TV series, the relation between Mulan and Li has been elaborated, and that is also why the series achieved high audience ratings. Their story develops in conformity with the love story in modern TV dramas, echoing popular taste in modern times.

The representation of Li Liang to some extent reflects a preferable type of man in the modern world: he is sensitive, considerate, caring, and humorous. He is also unusual. He is constructed as an unprecedented general particularly through his three impersonations in the series. As a general, a symbol of authority and discipline, Li is not supposed to impersonate a woman to entertain his subordinates. In his first impersonation, he willingly

puts on a female mask and a scarf and dances like a woman in front of his subordinates as a punishment for losing the tug of war game. Due to his inability to perform authentic femininity, the whole performance is rendered comedic and amusing. Victoria Flanagan's succinct analyses on male cross-dressing in children's literature can be used here for Li's impersonation:

> While he is cross-dressed, the male protagonist's biological sex is never adequately disguised to the extent that he could genuinely be considered a female, and his inability to give a convincing feminine performance is often constructed in a humorous, carnivalized fashion. His failure in this respect is supposed to be conceived by the reader/viewer as humiliating for him as a subject, but amusing for the reader as it unfolds. (51)

With only a female mask and a scarf, Li is entirely unable to conceal his masculine identity. His cross-dressing performance is far from the type of drag performance mentioned by Butler, which "plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed" ([1990] 1999, 175). Li's impersonation is unable to make a real distinction between his biological sex and his cross-dressing performance; that is to say, he is unable to perform genuinely as a female. His incompetence at giving an authentic feminine performance not only creates a humorous and comedic effect but also reverses the power relationship between him and his subordinates. As a general, Li has a superior power over his subordinates; however, impersonating a woman as a punishment and his failure in performing authentic femininity suggest a humiliating position in which he will be perceived by his subordinates and in consequence their power relationship is overturned in a carnivalesque mode. Li's willingness to accept the punishment constructs him as a straightforward, humorous, and easy to approach person.

His second impersonation, although as comedic as the first, is more complicated in many aspects. After Mulan comes back from the battlefield, she is bestowed in marriage upon the Princess, which may lead to some severe consequences. Mulan therefore reveals her gender identity to Li and asks for his help. With the help of the Prince, Li performs a theatrical show for the Queen and the Emperor. In the show, the Prince plays the role of the emperor of their enemy, Tu Jue, who catches a cross-dressing female soldier in his army and decides to put her to death because she violates patriarchal law. Li impersonates the poor female soldier, who joins the army for her aging father and is finally killed by the Tu

Jue emperor. In contrast to his first impersonation, on this occasion Li is fully dressed up: he puts on a gown with a long scarf; he wears exaggerated make-up, emphasizing his eyes and mouth; he also puts on a wig with long hair, which looks dry and damaged. He imitates a woman's voice which sounds really bizarre. His biological sex seems to be better covered this time, but the exaggerated make-up, strange hair-style and the high-pitched voice make him very weird, or very unwomanly. He waves the scarf in the way he thinks a woman does, but he is still unable to give a convincing feminine performance. Compared to Mulan's serious cross-dressing performance, Li's unqualified performance combining with his weird appearance is highly entertaining. To quote Flanagan again, male cross-dressing performances are often comedic and seldom serious:

> When males dress up as girls, it is generally not for the purposes of a disguise designed to help them escape their previous masculine experiences, as is the case with female characters. Instead, it is part of a brief theatrical "act" or performance, often presented to the reader or viewer as part of a comedy routine—the humor of which is based upon the male subject's inherent inability to give a convincing feminine performance. (133-134)
>
> …male cross-dressing is used for comedic purposes. The male cross-dresser, adorned in feminine apparel worn in such an inexpert manner that his true sex remains no secret, is a familiar and well-established comedic strategy in an adult cultural context. (135)

Indeed, with such a weird appearance, Li does not intent to hide his true sex from the outset. The comedic and entertaining effect has been highlighted through his inexpert performance and the unusual visual representation. While the rendered effect of the show is humorous and amusing, the intended purpose of the performance is serious because it is related to the life and death of Mulan. Also, the main theme of the show, filial piety, is paralleled with the filial act of the Prince. Although the main purpose of the show is to save Mulan, the Prince also means to perform the show to entertain his parents, a filial act included in *The Twenty-four Filial Exemplars*.[72] The Chinese Emperor and the Queen are greatly amused by their theatrical performance and also very happy with their son's filial act. As a result, Mulan is exempt from punishment for deceiving the Emperor and praised

[72] *The Twenty-four Filial Exemplars* is a collection of 24 classic filial stories. It is written by Guo Jujing, a scholar of Yuan Dynasty (AD 1260-1368).

for her filial piety and achievements.

The third impersonation happens before the whole series closes, and it is different from Li's previous two performances because Li is not aware of the impersonation. In the last part of the series, Mulan is dying because she is seriously injured in a fight with an enemy. With the help of the Kitchen God, the souls of Mulan and Li are taken to heaven. They are told that Mulan was originally destined to be born as a boy in this life, but she boldly contradicted the Jade Emperor and therefore was punished and born as a girl. When hearing that, Mulan is angry and once again blames the Jade God for changing people's destiny at his own will. Furiously, the Jade God swaps the biological sexes of Mulan and Li and sends them back to the human world. Meanwhile, the mothers of the couple are terrified to see their children lose consciousness and therefore swap their clothes according to the traditional practice in the countryside. They believe that if they swap the outer/gender appearances of the couple, the messengers from the other world cannot catch their souls and Mulan and Li can safely regain consciousness. When the couple wake up and notice the changes, they both scream loudly and believe that their biological sexes have been swapped. Li bashfully rests his head on Mulan's shoulder and begs her not to dump him due to his ugly appearance. Mulan promises in a masculine and mighty way that she will never be disloyal to her "wife." However, when the couple is told that they still keep their original sexes, they both are apparently relieved and look embarrassed.

The third impersonation is also represented in a humorous mode, but the humor relies on the two cross-dressers performing certain gender behaviours without knowing that their biological sexes have not been changed. They consciously perform femininity and masculinity and believe that their gender performances are natural and linked with their innate sexes. Their last cross-dressing performances can be validated as a legitimate deduction that gender is prescriptive, constructed, illusory, or in Butler's terms, performative. Furthermore, it is also noteworthy that the visual representation of Li in his last impersonation is represented to bring a comedic effect: he still puts on exaggerating make-up. Compared to Mulan, who is represented as a "normal" male, Li is construed as an "unusual" female. The distinctive disparity in visual representation of the couple reveals the conservative ideology of the TV series production team: while female cross-dressing is serious, male cross-dressing is rendered comedic, and this in consequence reinforces conventional gender boundaries rather than questioning gender stereotypes. In accordance with Flanagan's finding that in transgender discourse that "male cross-dressing narratives provide a representation of gender that is surprisingly conservative in nature," Li's three

impersonations in the 1999 TV series are *not* surprisingly conservative (50). The conservative nature in Li's cross-dressing performances, revealing the embedded patriarchal ideology, prevents the 1999 TV series from being a feminist interpretation of the Mulan story.

Overall, Mulan in the 1999 TV series is constructed as a modern and hybrid heroine, who is agentic and emancipated, but the gender representation of Li to some extent denotes patriarchal ideology embedded in the series. Li's three cross-dressing performances are all presented in a comedic mode, suggesting that he is "unable to discard [his] subjectivity in favor of a feminine one" (Flanagan, 15). His lack of interest in performing a convincing femininity reveals the hierarchy between male and female and therefore unveils the implicit ideology of the whole series. Furthermore, the storyline is somewhat problematic in picturing a fully emancipated heroine as it is often suggested that Mulan cannot achieve her goals without the help of deities, and that being born as a girl is a punishment. Also, the last sequence of the series depicts Mulan as a mother and a wife having an ordinary life in the countryside, strongly suggesting her return to patriarchy and to the traditional role she has long been expected to be by her society. The 1999 TV series does not really emancipate Mulan from patriarchal norms; on the contrary, it still reinforces gender stereotypes and gender boundaries.

Suppressed Femininity in the 2009 Film Retelling

Although the two TV series and the 2009 film all aim at the largest audience, their target audience groups are very different. While the two TV series aim to appeal to an audience with a Chinese cultural background, the latest film is produced to attract a much larger audience from different cultures in the global world. The 2009 film begins with a shot of the hostage singer Vitas on a white feather robe with his long hair flying against the blue sky, creating an exotic effect. The scene is accompanied with Vitas' beautiful high-pitched solo. His voice is soul touching, but the melody is sad, foretelling the tone of the whole film.

Different from most of the Mulan retellings in multimodal form, in which her life before joining the war has been given a relatively detailed description, the 2009 film plays down her life as a female. A more detailed description about her feminine life before she takes on her disguise as a male soldier is essential to see how she constructs gender identity and performs different gender behaviours later on the battlefield. Understating femininity at the outset foreshadows the insignificance of gender performance and the sacrifice of

femininity for the sake of something she values more: love, the love for her father. Similar to Disney's cherry blossom moment, upon which the close father/daughter relationship has been grounded, there is also a starry night moment which defines the strong bond between Mulan and her father in the latest film. In the sequence, the father/daughter relationship is represented in a subtle way. It begins when Mulan stops weaving because she hears her aged father coughing. She then takes a bottle of wine to him in the yard, where he is cleaning his sword under a starry sky. Her father tells her to marry soon after he leaves, and he also foresees his death:

> One day if you find one more star in the sky,
> (有一天妳發現天空多了一顆星星)
> That means I am with your mother.
> (那就是我找妳娘去了)
> Your mother has been gone for so many years.
> (妳娘走了這麼多年)
> She must be very lonely.
> (挺寂寞的)

Mulan does not respond to his words; instead, she looks at him silently and then looks at the sky calmly. The moment is represented with soft and sad music. In the next scene, Mulan, wearing armour, attentively watches her father as he sleeps soundly in his bed, and then she leaves home with her horse slowly and silently at midnight. The whole scene is accompanied with touching and sad music played on a traditional Chinese instrument, the erhu (二胡), known as the Chinese two-string fiddle in the West.

Although she is represented as a runaway heroine, she is not depicted as a social outcast as are other runaway heroines. In the 2009 film Mulan neither has problems fitting into her society nor is she incapable of performing conventionally defined femininity. The "runaway" sequence in the film mixes cultures from the west and the east by reconstructing Mulan as a runaway heroine with a sad and tragic tone. Although similar to other runaway heroines, she is represented as heroic and individualistic, but she is not attributed with the same level of subjective agency as them because she joins the war entirely for the sake of her father. However, a runaway heroine does possess a certain degree of agency, which may make her more preferable in the eyes of a modern global

audience. Even though the runaway sequence seems to come from Disney's adaptation, the representation of the scene is very different, particularly in the employment of music. As Hirofumi Katsuno and Jeffrey Maret notice, the American cartoon/animation productions tend "to cue viewers to the tone of the action on screen. The U.S. soundtrack has a much more pop quality…" (84). While Disney's runaway sequence uses music with heavy drum beats to cue viewers to the heroine's determined action, the 2009 film employs a sad and slow music played on an erhu to present the solemn mood of the heroine. Both of the sequences follow silent film tradition as no conversation takes place. Whereas one draws viewers' attention to the action of the character, the other emphasizes the inner feelings of the heroine. The slow and sad motion of the sequence constructs the sacrificial love of Mulan towards her father in a subtle way, reflecting Chinese tradition that discourages open expression of love. The representation of the runaway sequence in Ma's film constructs a typical Chinese parent/daughter relationship in a Chinese way.

Besides the runaway sequence, the sad and heroic tone of the film has been strengthened through the constant sacrifices of the heroine. She first sacrifices femininity for her father, and then she has to sacrifice feminine love towards Wentai, her beloved comrade and the son of the emperor, for the peace of her country. At the beginning of her army life, she shows fear, and worries about the exposure of her gender identity. She cries helplessly in front of Wentai, who accidentally discovers her secret. Her fear, worry, and helplessness denote feminine features which are not allowed to be shown on a battlefield. It is Wentai, although he also gradually falls in love with her, who constantly reminds Mulan to suppress her femininity. He commands Mulan to kill the leader of their enemy when Mulan shows hesitation in doing so. He cruelly tells her that love cannot exist on the battlefield after Mulan makes a wrong strategic decision in battle because of her concern about him. He pretends to be dead in order to curb her emotional tie with him. As the son of the emperor, his prior concern is the safety of country. As the prince of the country, he is also the symbol of patriarchy. He refuses her love in order to maintain the safety of his country, as well as the stability of patriarchy. In front of a patriarchal figure, Mulan's femininity has been continually suppressed and sacrificed due to the consideration for national security.

Ma Jingle's *Hua Mulan* is basically an anti-war film rather than a film about the legendary heroine, as it emphasizes horror, suffering, loss, and the human costs of war. In the film, Mulan is portrayed as a peace-loving general who is forced to fight against intruders.

General Hua in your eyes in reality is a person who most fears war.
(你們眼中的花將軍其實是個最害怕打仗的人)
I have been scared; I have escaped.
(我一直在害怕，一直在逃避)
…..
Escaping will not stop the war.
(逃避停止不了戰爭)
Fear only makes us lose more.
(害怕只能讓我們失去更多)
From now on, I will become stronger to protect every one of you.
(從今以後我會變得更加強大保護你們每一個人)
And you have to become stronger to protect every one around you.
(而你們也要變得更加強大保護起身邊每一個人)

With the encouragement of Mulan, the once downcast army regains courage and fighting spirit. They fight only when it is necessary and when they are forced to do so. In the film the Chinese soldiers are represented as fighting bravely and dying with dignity. No matter how cruelly their enemies torture them, they never surrender because they are brave and loyal to their country.

At the end of the film, Mulan once again sacrifices her love for Wentai, fully displaying her merits as a model for Chinese people. After the war, the Chinese emperor decides to forge a political alliance with their enemy through marriage: Wentai is going to marry the princess of the enemy country. In the last scene, Wentai urges Mulan to elope with him. Mulan turns him down for the sake of national peace. It is odd that Wentai has long given national security priority over his individual love and then suddenly values his love for Mulan more than his country. Perhaps his sudden turn is to highlight the heroism and tragedy of Mulan. Because Mulan is the model for Chinese people, she has to achieve what others cannot achieve, bear what others cannot bear, and sacrifice what others cannot sacrifice. Her life is destined and there is no room for her to develop subjective agency when individual love has to be sacrificed for the sake of the greater love for the whole nation. She is again the spokesperson, or victim, of Confucian values.

Ma Jingle's *Hua Mulan* is probably the saddest and the most heroic Mulan retelling in multi-modal form. Although it is produced recently, it does not catch up with contemporary

feminist thought. The emancipation of Mulan has been rendered impossible when the film explicitly favours a heroine who is willing to sacrifice everything for others and for her country. Gender performance of the cross-dressing heroine, the most astonishing part of the story, has been downplayed while traditional merits, such as filial love, self-sacrifice, patriotism, bravery, and loyalty to one's country, have been greatly emphasized. The 2009 film not only constructs Mulan as a model Chinese girl but also represents Chinese people as brave, loyal, and *peace-loving*. Today, many countries tend to view the rise of China as a threat. Through a film production like the 2009 *Hua Mulan*, emphasizing the virtues of Chinese people for its intended global audience, China may be able to negotiate a better or less challenging image with the rest of the world.

Conclusion

The three Mulan retellings in this chapter denote at least two substantial points. First, the productions of the Mulan retelling in multimodal form have now entered a co-production era due to financial considerations in production cost and the revenue these products can generate from global markets. Second, the representations of the heroine and the story considerably alter from one version to another, reflecting to different extents how far the three retellings respond to contemporary thought and their discrepancies in target audience groups and interpretations of the story. Gender construction in the 1995 TV series is strikingly conservative and can be regarded as a substantial backlash in response to contemporary feminist movements. The stress on the traditional feminine virtue of chastity has firmly contained any possibility of female emancipation, and the cross-dressing heroine is not provided with any chances to break gender norms and further challenge polarized gender categories. However, it is also noteworthy that the series received a disappointing audience rating, possibly because the cast of the series is not strong enough. But more importantly, the low audience rating also reveals the taste of the public, for which a traditional heroine is no longer preferable in modern times. Similarly, the high audience rating of the 1999 TV series also discloses popular taste: a more agentic, modern, and hybrid heroine is preferable for modern viewers. The heroine represented by the 1999 TV series can potentially become a multidimensional and agentic female, but the embedded patriarchal ideology in the series has greatly diminished any possibility that the retelling might be considered a feminist text because it still reinforces, though implicitly, the idea of gender hierarchy.

Ma Jingle's heroine is also restricted from obtaining emancipation not because of

patriarchal ideology but more because of patriotic thinking. Although self-sacrifice for the benefit of family has long been regarded as a female virtue in a patriarchal society, in this film the sacrifices of Mulan are mostly made for the sake of national security. Her total self-sacrifice and self-abnegation has made it impossible for her to obtain subjective agency, but the altruistic image of the heroine can help boost national consciousness for Chinese viewers and create a more positive image of Chinese when the film is consumed by a global audience.

Conclusion

After going through the Mulan retellings produced from different world regions over the last 1500 years, the research shows that the Mulan retellings produced in Chinese and Sinophone regions and in the Diaspora have mostly been used to transmit cultural traditions or to promote certain concepts, usually reflecting the ideology of the dominant, such as filial piety, loyalty, chastity, patriotism, national consciousness, and feminist consciousness, and that the retellings from the other world regions tend to employ the story to re-emphasize the cultural imaginary about China and Chinese people. That is to say, Mulan has been constructed as a role model for the public — the young generation in particular —who have Chinese cultural backgrounds; however, for the reader/audience who does not have a Chinese cultural background, she is represented either as an imaginary Chinese girl, for example the heroine in the Japanese retelling, or as a western-minded heroine whose story takes place in an imaginary Oriental world as she is in most of the western retellings. Overall, there is also a tendency for Mulan to have been transformed, to varying degrees, into a heroine with hybrid and modern attributes in the modern retellings.

Generally speaking, most of the Mulan retellings in my research appear to construct the heroine's gender performance in a similarly conservative way; however, in some texts Mulan's gender performance and the subjective agency attributed to her have been rendered in significantly different ways. Based on the research questions addressed in the Introduction, the study suggests generally three types of heroine: (1) most of the retellings favour a heroine who can perform distinguished masculinity on the battlefield and whose femininity has to be totally suppressed and sacrificed during her cross-dressing period. The heroine of this kind performs traditional femininity before joining the army and after returning home. In most cases she goes back to patriarchy while in few cases she commits suicide at the end; (2) some of the retellings incline to represent a heroine with gender fluidity. The heroine of this kind usually manifests masculine spirit at the outset and is permitted to go back to the battlefield in the future when the state is in need of her, and in most cases her story is recreated in a socialist context; (3) strictly speaking, only three retellings in my research collection give a feminist interpretation of the Mulan story. They reshape the image of the cross-dressing heroine by representing her as an emancipated and agentic subject who achieves outstanding feats as a male without sacrificing femininity.

The three retellings, one from the Diaspora and the other two from Chinese and Sinophone regions, are all produced in word-and-image form — picture book — for child readers.

The subjective agency Mulan possesses ranges from low to high in the above three categories. Wherever the heroine is portrayed as returning to a traditional female role at the end of the story, it is always suggested that she is reincorporated into a patriarchal system, and therefore her subjective agency is relatively low because she cannot resist Confucian regulations imposed upon her. Some retellings of this kind which end with the heroine committing suicide, including real death and social death, symbolize the impossibility of emancipation for women because the price for violating social norms is permanent exclusion from patriarchy; therefore, it is an unattainable goal to obtain subjective agency for the cross-dressing heroine in these retellings. However, her capability to perform an outstanding masculinity can lead to a legitimate argument that gender is not innate but can be acquired through "reiterative and citational practice" (Butler, 1993: 2). Although the heroine in this category is not emancipated, her authentic masculinity performance has posed a challenge to polarized gender categories.

The second category of retellings has attributed the heroine with a higher level of subjective agency so that there is a higher possibility for her to behave against gender norms in comparison with the first category. Often gender fluidity has been implicated through a more feminine heroine on the battlefield, but due to the conservative or ambiguous ending the issues of subjective agency and female emancipation have not been carried forward. Confucian ideology, or patriarchal socialism in some retellings produced in contemporary China, still underpins the whole retelling. The last category, three picture books for child readers, manifests a surprisingly feminist potential in the Mulan story although they achieve the feminist mission by using different methods. Jeanne Lee's diasporic retelling remodels the image of Mulan mainly through a sophisticated manipulation of verbal and visual narratives, which plays down the masculine narrative and reinforces feminine narrative, whereas the other two retellings greatly reduce the cross-dressing scene and focus more on the femininity scene, leading to the result that femininity has been significantly emphasized. The three retellings for child readers have successfully emancipated the heroine from not only the oppressive patriarchy but also the Confucian metanarrative of the Mulan story, and they also demonstrate that it is possible to represent an agentic heroine in a gender-swapping story.

The findings of my study lead to a number of implications. First, the cross-dressing

heroine can be emancipated and further escape the Confucian metanarrative of the Mulan story not through performing genuine masculinity but through performing femininity. The cross-dressing can enable the heroine to obtain subjective agency without sacrificing femininity, or without performing gender behaviour in a way which blends masculinity and femininity. She is able to behave beyond social regulations and resist Confucian constructions. Second, my study supports Flanagan's finding that children's literature could be more proactive in gender modeling because the three feminist Mulan retellings are all produced for child readers in the genre of picture book. Third, the western retellings similarly feature more conservative cross-dressing performances because the representations of Mulan have been greatly compromised by western imaginary Orientalism, which has taken priority over feminist thinking regardless that feminist movements owe their origin to the western countries, such as the United States and France.

There are also some limitations of my research. First, although the study tries to cover as many of the Mulan retellings as possible, there are still some difficulties in accessing some data — for example, some old film versions. Also, the Mulan retelling in other forms, for instance television advertisement, pornography, are not encompassed in my research both because of difficult access and because the data is not enough to form one chapter. Another limitation derives from the limited theorization of some narrative forms, for example comics and television serials; thus, I can only borrow theories from similar narrative forms such as picture book and film. Third, diasporic culture for Chinese seems to be applicable only to Chinese American culture. Information about the Chinese Diaspora in countries such as France or Australia is inadequate, perhaps because these diasporic cultures are smaller and, on the whole, more recent have not yet developed large scale (or large budget) artistic expression. Therefore, future research will probably move away from the Mulan text to explore similarities and differences in the issues of gender and race among various Chinese Diasporic cultures by looking at a broader range of Chinese stories.

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Appendices

Appendix One--Chapter 1

Poetry:

No.	Author	Title	Earliest Appearance or reference
1	Anonymous	*The Ballad of Mulan*	Guo, Maoqian, ed. *Yuefu Shiji*, [The Song Dynasty (AD 960-1279) Compendium of Lyrics, Songs And Poems].
2	Wei, Yuanfu	*The Song of Mulan*	Guo, Maoqian, ed. *Yuefu Shiji*, [The Song Dynasty (AD 960-1279) Compendium of Lyrics, Songs And Poems].

Opera:

No.	Author/Editor	Title	Earliest Appearance or reference
1	Xu, Wei (1521-1593)	*Maid Mulan Joins The Army in Her Father's Stead*	1556 (Ming Dynasty AD 1368-1644)

Novel:

No.	Author	Title	Earliest Appearance or Reference
1	Chu Renhuo (1675-1695)	*Sui Tang Yan Yi (The History of the Sui and Tang Dynasties)*	Guangzhou: Guandong Renmin Chubanshe, 1985. (Qing Dynasty)
2	Anonymous (written after 1732)	*The Legendary Story of a Girl Who Is Loyal, Filial, Heroic, and Chaste*	Beijing: Huaxia Chubanshe, 1995. (Qing Dynasty)
3	Zhang, Shaoxian	*The Legendary Story of a Filial and Heroic Girl from the Northern Wei*	Anhui: Huangshan Shushe, 1850; 1991. (Qing Dynasty 1644-1911)

Appendix Two--Chapter 2

Opera:

	Author/Editor	Title	Earliest Appearance or reference
1	Zhou, Yibai	*Hua Mu Lan*	Shanghai: Keiming Shudian, 1941.
2	Ma, Shaobo	*Mulan Joins The Army*	Beijing: Xinhua Shudian, 1949; 1952.
3	Guo, Xiaofeng	*New Hua Mu Lan*	Wuhan: Tongsu Tushu Chubanshe, 1951.
4	Lin, Yan	*Hua Mu Lan*	Hebei: Renmin Chubanshe, 1951.
5	Wu, Jialai	*Hua Mu Lan*	Heilongjiang: Renmin Chubanshe, 1956.
6	Chen, Xianzhang	*Hua Mu Lan*	Henan: Henan Renmin Chubanshe, 1954; 1980.

Novel:

	Author	Title	Earliest Appearance or Reference
1	Wu, Shutian	*Hua Mu Lan* ☆	Shanghai: Ertong Chubanshe, 1948.
2	Xiao, Xiao	*Hua Mu Lan* ☆	Taipei: Da Fang Shuju, 1953.
3	Dong, Qianli	*Hua Mu Lan* ☆	Hong Kong: Asia Chubanshe, 1959.
4	Chen, Chiu-Fan	*Hua Mu Lan* ☆	Taipei: Dongfang Chubanshe, 1988.
5	Liu, Xiusen	*The Biography of Hua Mu Lan*	Tonghua: Beifang Funü Ertong Chubanshe, 1990.
6	Guan, Jia-Chi	*Hua Mu Lan* ☆	Taipei: Wen Jing She, 1998.
7	Wang, Bi-Zhen	*Heroine from A Northern Country: Hua Mu Lan*	Taipei: Li Ming Wenhua, 2001.
8	Ming, Deyuan & Li Jingye	*Hua Mu Lan*	Beijing: Jiefangjun Wenyi Chubanshe, 2002.

Note: The books titled with ☆ mark are young adult novels.

Film:

No.	Director/Actress	Title	Reference
1	Bu, Wancang/Chen, Yunshang	*A Woman Warrior*	Fujian: Fujian Yinxiang Chubanshe, 1939; 2007.
2	Chang, Xiangyu (actress)	*Hua Mu Lan* (opera film)	Huanghe Yinxiang Chubanshe, 1956; 1996.
3	Yueh Feng/Ling, Bo	*Lady General Hua Mu-Lan*	Hong Kong: Celestial Shaw Bros, 1964; 2004.
4	Xiao Lang & Qiu Lili/Bai, Shuxian	*Saga of Mulan* (opera film)	Tianjin: Tianjin Film Studio and Changchun Film Studio, 1994.

Appendix Three--Chapter 3

Diasporic and International novels:

	Author	Title	Reference
D	Kingston, Maxine Hong	*The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*	New York: Vintage International, 1975; 1989.
I	Tanaka, Yoshiki	*The Legendary Heroine*	Kyoto: Tokuma Shoten Publishing, 1991. Taipei: Jianduan Chubanshe, 1996.
D	Yan, Hansheng	*Hua Mulan: Femme-général de La Chine*	Paris: You Feng, 1998.
I	Divers, Laurent	*La Légende de Mulan*	Chevron, Belgium: Editions Hemma, 2001. Shanghai: Shanghai Yiwen Chubanshe, 2002.
I	Dokey, Cameron	*Wild Orchid: A Retelling of "The Ballad of Mulan"*	New York, London, Toronto, Sydney: Simon Pulse, 2009.

D refers to diasporic novel; I refers to international novel.

Appendix Four--Chapter 4

Picture-Story Books:

No.	Author/Illustrator	Title	Reference
1	Yang, Ying/Wang, Shuhui (based on Ma Shaobo's opera version)	*Mulan Joins The Army*	China: Lianhuanhua Chubanshe, 1950.
2	Yi, Hesheng/ Shu, Zewei et al. (based on Hao Yenxia's version)	*Illustrated Version: Hua Mulan Sweeps the North* （繪圖本花木蘭掃北）	Changsha: Hunan Chubanshe, 1997.

Picture Books:

No.	Author/Illustrator	Title	Reference
1	Jiang, Wei & Jiang, Cheng An	*The Legend of Mu Lan: A Heroine of Ancient China*	Monterey: Victory Press, 1992.
2	Chin, Charlie/Arai, Tomie	*China's Bravest Girl: The Legend of Hua Mu Lan*	Emeryville: Children's Book Press, 1993.
3	Lee, Jeanne M.	*The Song of Mulan*	Arden: Front Street, 1995.
4	San Souci, Robert D./ Tseng, Jean & Mou Sien	*Fa Mulan*	New York: Hyperion Books, 1998.
5	Zhang, Song Nan	*The Ballad of Mulan*	Union City: Pan Asian, 1998.
6	Lin, Shu-Ping et al./Wang, Fong-Chou & Cheng, Mei-Zhen	"Mulan Joins the War in Her Father's Stead." *Classical Stories on Loyalty and Filial Piety* (經典忠孝故事)	Kaoshiung: Xueyan Wenhua, 2003.
7	Lee, Tong/Yu, Chun-Hua	*Hua Mulan*	Chengdu: Tiendi Chubanshe, 2007.

Comics

No.	Author/Illustrator	Title	Reference
1	Xu, Deyuan & Jiang, Wei. (trans. Wang Jian)	*Hua Mulan: China's Sweetest Magnolia*	Singapore: Asiapac, 1996.

Appendix Five--Chapter 5

Animation & Animated Cartoon Adaptation:

No.	Director	Title	Reference
1	Bancroft, Tony & Barrt Cook	*Mulan*	Walt Disney Pictures, 1998.
2	Rooney, Darrell & Lynne Southerland	*Mulan II*	Walt Disney Pictures, 2005.
3	Pettus. Jr., Jerry (Executive Producer)	*The Secret of Mulan*	UAV Entertainment, 1997.
4	Phillips, Roz (producer)	*Mulan*	Anchor Bay Entertainment, 1998.
5	Kreftmeier, Henk (Executive Producer)	*The Legend of Mulan*	Springboard Home Video, 1999; 2008.
6	Zhang, Song Nan	*The Ballad of Mulan*	Pan Asian Publications, 2009

Appendix Six--Chapter 6

Television Serials:

No.	Director/Actress	Title	Reference
1	Wang, Yi-Sheng/Yang, Li-Jing	*Talented Elite under the Sun: Mulan* (天地奇英：木蘭)	Taipei: TTV, 1995.
2	Yang, Pei-Pei/Yuan, Yongyi	*Hua Mulan*	Taipei: CTV, 1999.

The Latest Movie:

No.	Director/Actress	Title	Reference
1	Ma, Jingle Chucheng/Zhao, Wei	*Hua Mulan*	Starlight International,2009.