

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative descriptive research design. A qualitative method is chosen because this research tries to understand meaning, not to count numbers. The main goal is to interpret how the character of Mulan is built through the story, dialogue, and gestures in the film, and how her experience relates to gender, social class, and culture. Because the focus is on interpreting meaning rather than measuring data statistically, a qualitative approach fits this study best.

More specifically, this research uses textual analysis combined with an intersectional feminist approach as the main lens for reading the data. Textual analysis means that the researcher looks closely at the film as a text, paying attention to dialogue, narration, and character action, to understand how meaning is created. The intersectional feminist approach, based on Kimberle Crenshaw's theory, guides the researcher to look at gender, social class, and cultural norms together, not as separate topics, because these three things often work at the same time in shaping Mulan's choices and experiences. This combination allows the researcher to explain not only what happens in the film, but also why it happens and what it means for Mulan as a woman living inside a patriarchal and militaristic society.

3.2 Source of Data

3.2.1 Primary Data

The primary data for this study consists of two related but distinct components: script data and dialogue data. Script data refers to the complete written transcript of Disney's live-action *Mulan* (2020), credited to Rick Jaffa, Amanda Silver, Lauren Hynek, and Elizabeth Martin, obtained through legitimate channels. Dialogue data refers specifically to the spoken lines within that transcript, the exact words exchanged between characters, which form the main linguistic unit that

the researcher classifies and interprets in Chapter Four. This distinction matters because the transcript version obtained for this study records dialogue and non-verbal sound cues, such as (GASPS) or (GRUNTS), but does not contain the narrative-style stage directions describing physical action that would be found in a formal shooting script. For this reason, the primary data of this study is more precisely the dialogue as written in the script, rather than the fuller script apparatus of stage directions describing physical action that a published screenplay would normally include; how this gap is addressed is explained in section 3.2.2 below.

The script used in this study represents the narrative blueprint of *Mulan* (2020), containing all dialogue, character interactions, and descriptive elements that make up the story. For the purposes of this study, particular attention is paid to the parts of the script and film featuring *Mulan*, including her introduction and family background, which establish her position within a patriarchal and militarized society; the marriage proposal and bridegroom training, which reveal the gender expectations placed on her; her decision to disguise herself and join the army, which marks her negotiation of identity; training and battlefield moments that show her navigating class and cultural pressures alongside gender constraints; and moments of conflict or revelation that illustrate how she confronts and ultimately redefines these overlapping expectations. From this initial reading, the researcher selected data extracts for in-depth analysis, chosen because each excerpt either explicitly foregrounds *Mulan's* gender, class, or cultural positioning or contains dialogue in which these identities visibly intersect; moments in which *Mulan* is present but none of these three elements is textually salient were excluded from close analysis.

The dialogue data provides rich textual material for analysis, revealing how *Mulan's* identity is constructed through the words characters speak to and about her. However, because the obtained transcript does not contain the stage directions of a full literary script describing physical action, dialogue alone cannot capture certain wordless moments, such as a gesture, a physical action, or a piece of costuming, in

which gender, class, or cultural positioning is also constructed. Section 3.2.2 explains how this study addresses that gap.

3.2.2 Supplementary Data from the Film

Because the written transcript used as script data does not include stage directions describing physical action, this study also draws on Mulan's gestures in the film *Mulan* (2020) itself as a supplementary data source, watched directly by the researcher. This supplementary data consists of visual and gestural elements, Mulan's physical actions, facial expressions, posture, and costuming, together with other characters' visible reactions to her, that construct meaning about gender, social class, or cultural norms but are not recorded as spoken dialogue. Examples include the wordless moment in which Mulan dons her father's armor before leaving home, the physical perseverance she shows during the mountain training exercise, and the moment she removes her helmet in front of the army to reveal her identity. These supplementary data are recorded descriptively by the researcher, noting the gesture's approximate placement in the film, the physical action observed, and the aspect of gender, class, or culture it appears to construct, following the same data sheet format described in section 3.3.

This supplementary data is not treated as equal in weight to the dialogue data; dialogue remains the primary basis for analysis because this study's central contribution is reading the script as a literary text. The film's visual and gestural data are used specifically to fill the gaps that a dialogue-only transcript leaves open, ensuring that embodied or wordless expressions of Mulan's empowerment and constraint are not overlooked simply because the obtained script does not narrate them.

3.2.3 Supporting Literature

In addition to the primary data, this study also draws on supporting literature, particularly journal articles and books on feminist theory, intersectionality, patriarchy, gender roles, and social class, as already discussed in Chapter Two. This supporting literature also includes

previous studies about Mulan (2020), which help the researcher compare this study's findings with what other researchers have already found. These sources are not analyzed directly in the same way as the script, but are used to explain and support the interpretation of the primary data.

3.3 Research Instrument

In this qualitative study, the main research instrument is the researcher himself. This means that the researcher is the one who watches the film, reads the supporting literature, and interprets the meaning behind Mulan's words and actions, using the theories explained in Chapter Two as a guide. Because the researcher acts as the main instrument, personal understanding, careful reading, and consistent reference to the theoretical framework become very important to keep the analysis objective and trustworthy.

To support the researcher in collecting and organizing data, a simple data sheet is also used as a secondary instrument. This data sheet is a table that records the approximate time code, a short description of the dialogue or gesture, and a note on which aspect, whether gender, social class, or cultural norm, is shown in that entry. This tool helps the researcher stay organized while going through the script and film repeatedly and makes it easier to find the same data again during the analysis stage.

3.4 Data Collection Technique

Data collection for this study involves systematic close reading and textual analysis of the movie script. The researcher employs the following procedures:

3.4.1 Reading the Script

The first step is reading the complete script of Mulan (2020) carefully and repeatedly. The first reading is done to gain a general understanding of the story, the characters, and the overall plot structure as

presented in the written text. The following readings are done more slowly and closely, paying attention to dialogue and stage directions that might be overlooked during an initial read-through.

3.4.2 Identifying Relevant Dialogue and Gestures

The second step is identifying dialogue and gestures relevant to the research questions. Because the transcript obtained for this study records dialogue and sound cues but does not describe physical action in words, the researcher cannot rely on the written script alone to identify Mulan's gestures. The researcher therefore watches the film itself alongside the transcript, using the film to identify the characters present and the physical action taking place, while using the transcript to identify the exact spoken dialogue. The researcher marks the dialogue as written in the script, together with a short note, based on watching the film, on the surrounding context, such as which characters are involved and the action or gesture observed.

3.4.3 Selecting and Sorting the Data

The third step is selecting the script and film data extracts that clearly relate to gender roles, social class pressure, patriarchal structure, or cultural norms, and setting aside excerpts that are not directly relevant to the research focus. Only textual data that shows a clear connection to at least one of these three aspects is kept for further analysis. This step keeps the data manageable and focused on answering the research questions.

3.4.4 Recording the Data

The last step is recording the selected data into the data sheet mentioned in the previous section. For dialogue data, each entry includes a brief note on the surrounding context and the exact dialogue as written in the transcript. For the supplementary data described in section 3.2.2, each entry instead includes a brief description of the visual action or gesture observed while watching the film, since no written dialogue

accompanies these moments. Every entry, whether dialogue-based or gesture-based, receives an early note on which category, gender, class, or culture, it seems to represent. This organized record becomes the basis for the analysis explained in the next section.

3.5 Data Analysis Technique

After the data is collected, the researcher analyzes it through several stages, adapted from common steps in qualitative content analysis. These stages are explained below.

3.5.1 Data Reduction

In this first stage, the researcher goes through all the collected script and film data extracts and removes information that turns out to be repetitive or not directly useful for answering the research questions. This stage keeps the analysis focused only on textual data that truly helps explain how gender, social class, and culture shape Mulan's experience as constructed in the script.

3.5.2 Data Classification

In this stage, the remaining script and film data extracts are grouped into categories based on the theoretical framework explained. For example, dialogue or stage directions showing Mulan being told to behave "properly" are grouped under gender roles, passages describing her father's illness and her family's limited options are grouped under social class pressure, and lines referencing family honor are grouped under cultural norms. Some excerpts may belong to more than one category at the same time, which is expected, since the intersectional approach assumes that these categories often overlap.

3.5.3 Intersectional Interpretation

In this stage, the researcher interprets the classified script and film data extracts using Kimberle Crenshaw's intersectional feminist

framework. Instead of explaining each category on its own, the researcher looks at how gender, social class, and cultural norms are constructed together within the same passage or gesture to shape Mulan's choices and limitations as written in the script. This stage is the heart of the analysis, because it connects the textual data back to the main theory and shows how Mulan's characterization cannot be fully explained by looking at only one category alone.

3.5.4 Drawing Conclusion

In the final stage, the researcher summarizes the findings from the previous stages to answer the two research questions. The researcher also compares these findings with the previous studies discussed, to show how this study's results are similar to or different from earlier research, and to confirm how this study fills the research gap explained. This conclusion becomes the basis for the discussion presented in Chapter Four.

