

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### A.1 Background of the Research

Literature is an art form that expresses ideas, feelings, and stories through language, both spoken and written (Baldick, 2001). According to Klarer (2005), literary works can be fiction, poetry, drama, and even films, and all of them can be analyzed with certain theories. Film itself can be called visual literature because it conveys life values through stories that are close to reality. Film and literature inspire each other, and both can touch the emotional side of the audience (Ramrao, 2016). As Larisu et al. (2022) explained, films have messages and life values that can enrich the audience's experience, especially because we can feel the character's struggle more realistically.

According to Jing (2023), film characters are not just figures on screen, but also become an emotional bridge between the audience and the story. Their journey, from inner conflict, motivation, to self-change, makes the story meaningful and more alive. Asmiaty et al. (2022) also said that characters reflect humans, with emotions and behaviors that support the story. If the main character has strong and unique characteristics, the story becomes more interesting because we can see the growth process from the challenges they face. In addition, Eder (2010) emphasized that character motivation is the key to driving the story. Their actions are born from personal values, emotions, and goals. This is especially

important in films that raise internal conflicts, because it shows how characters react to social pressure or traditional norms.

Nowadays, issues of identity, gender roles, and being an authentic self are increasingly being discussed. Many people, especially women, continue to struggle against societal expectations that do not align with their true selves. Rigid gender roles can restrict them from pursuing their own interests and goals, leading to frustration and resentment (Roseline, 2024). So, stories about female characters who dare to fight strict traditions become more meaningful. As Rudy (2024) said that films that feature women as central characters can be an effective medium for developing positive characters in the audience.

One interesting character who struggles to stay true to herself in a world that demands conformity and gets pressure to meet societal expectations is *Hua Mulan*, the protagonist of Disney's live-action adaptation of the film *Mulan* (2020), directed by Niki Caro. In the film, Mulan is portrayed as a young woman from ancient China who struggles to maintain her identity and values amid societal expectations that are extremely strict for her, particularly cultural pressures that limit her role as a woman.

Mulan possesses *chi*, a kind of inner strength, and unique abilities that are contrary to societal expectations and even typically associated with male warriors. Therefore, she is forced to suppress these traits to fulfill societal expectations of what an ideal woman should be and bring honor through marriage. These

pressures create internal and external conflicts that challenge her identity, sense of honor, and desire for authenticity. In response, Mulan makes bold choices that lead her to go against societal expectations, which results in a deep psychological struggle, including self-doubt, fear of rejection, the pressure of hiding her identity, and the constant effort to prove herself throughout her journey.

Through the challenges she chooses and faces, her journey is filled with emotional and internal conflicts that cannot be fully conveyed through actions or visuals alone. Therefore, exploring Mulan's internal struggle is essential to understanding how she develops psychologically as a character. To examine this aspect more deeply, this study applies Individual Psychology, as developed by Alfred Adler, which emphasizes internal motivation. This perspective illustrates how someone may initially feel inferior, driving them to grow, improve themselves, and achieve their life goals, as well as the significance of social interest in shaping their personality.

Alfred Adler was an Austrian psychiatrist and one of the most influential figures in early psychology. Born in Vienna in 1870 and passed away in 1937, he is known as the founder of Individual Psychology. This psychological approach focuses on human motivation, social relationships, and the individual's struggle for significance and a sense of belonging (Feist & Feist, 1976). Adler's theory provides several key concepts relevant to this analysis, including the feeling of inferiority, striving for superiority, fictional finalism, style of life, creative power, and social

interest. These principles align closely with Mulan's psychological journey, as she navigates internal conflicts and social pressures while trying to assert her true self in the face of societal expectations imposed on her as a woman.

This study builds upon earlier research that utilized the same films as a data source, emphasizing the novelty of this research by offering a new perspective through a psychological approach. Many studies discuss the film *Mulan* (2020), which focuses on gender (Usman et al., 2021; Citra & Febriana, 2022; Ramadhani et al., 2022; R. A. Putri & M. Thoyibi, 2024), cultural representation (L. Wang et al., 2020; Z. Wang, 2022), semiotics (Sandiva & Putri, 2022; Sinuraya et al., 2022; Fauzia et al., 2022; Narti & Sari, 2022; Maharani, 2021; Annisa & Manullang, 2022), moral values (Kaka & Winarta, 2023; Rahdani et al., 2022) and some psychological approach (Silviana, 2023; Choirudin et al., 2023) and none have discussed how Mulan's psychological development and inner struggle use Adler's framework. This presents a unique opportunity to analyze the film from a cultural or gendered lens with a deep psychological perspective.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze Mulan's struggle against societal expectations through the lens of Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology. By examining her internal conflicts, motivations, and journey towards personal growth, this research highlights the importance of embracing one's true identity and living authentically in the face of social pressure.

## **A.2 Problems of the Research**

The research problems in this study include the following:

1. How is the main character's struggle against societal expectations depicted in the Disney film *Mulan* (2020) from the perspective of Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology?
2. How do Adler's key concepts reflect *Mulan's* psychological development in overcoming societal expectations?

## **A.3 Objectives of the Research**

The following are research objectives based on the research problems above:

1. To analyze how the main character, *Mulan*, struggles against societal expectations as portrayed in Disney's *Mulan* (2020) using the perspective of Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology.
2. To explain how Adler's key concepts are reflected in *Mulan's* psychological development in her struggle against societal expectations.

## **A.4 Significances of the Research**

There are two significances of the research:

1. Theoretical

This research contributes to the field of literary studies by applying a psychological approach, specifically Adler's Individual Psychology theory. It

enhances the understanding of how character struggles are portrayed in literary works, particularly films, through a psychological lens.

## 2. Practical

On a practical level, this study has the potential to be a valuable reference for students and researchers who conduct character analysis using psychological theories. It can also support educators in teaching literary analysis, especially when exploring the psychological aspects of characters in literary narratives. In addition, this study seeks to increase readers' and film enthusiasts' appreciation for character development by offering deeper insight into the psychological struggles that shape a character's journey.

### **A.5 Limitations of the Research**

This study focuses solely on analyzing Mulan as the main character in the Disney film *Mulan* (2020) from a psychological perspective. This analysis will be limited to her psychological struggle against societal expectations as depicted in the film. The psychological theory used is Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology Theory. The analysis will not cover other characters in depth or compare the 2020 live-action adaptation with the 1998 animated version. Additionally, the data used is limited to specific dialogues and scenes from the *Mulan* (2020) film.

While societal expectations in the film are discussed, this study does not examine the actual history of ancient Chinese gender norms; instead, it focuses on their representation in the film. In addition, this study acknowledges that analyzing

a character is an interpretive process so that the result may be subjective depending on the researcher's perspective. Even so, the analysis remains grounded in Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology to maintain focus and validity.

#### **A.6 Definition of the Key Terms**

The following are some of the aspects that are thought to be essential in this research and are explained by the definition of important terms:

1. Societal Expectation

Societal expectations refer to the unwritten rules, norms, and values that a society imposes on its individuals, shaping how they are expected to behave, think, and live within the context of cultural, historical, and social factors. These expectations often guide behavior and social interaction, but may also create pressure that limits individuality, especially when they conflict with personal values or aspirations (Giddens, 2006).

2. Struggle Against Societal Expectations

This term refers to an individual's effort to resist, challenge, or redefine the societal norms that try to dictate their roles or identity. In this study, it highlights Mulan's resistance to traditional gender roles and her journey to stay true to herself and pursue authenticity despite strong cultural expectations.

### 3. Gender Roles

Gender roles are behaviors learned in society and considered appropriate or desirable for individuals based on sex. Gender roles include socio-cultural expectations about how a person should act, speak, dress, and behave. In today's society, traditionally, women are expected to have traits such as gentleness, passivity, and caring, and act as caregivers, housewives, and helpers. In contrast, men are associated with dominance, courage, and strength, and are expected to be breadwinners, leaders, or protectors. This division of roles places women in the private sphere and men in the public sphere, although over time, gender roles can change (More, 2023; Krainc, 2023).

### 4. False and True Identity

False identity refers to a condition in which someone hides or alters their authentic self in order to meet the expectations, rules, or judgments of their surrounding environment. This can happen due to fear of rejection, desire to belong, or pressure to conform to certain social roles. It often leads individuals to behave in ways that do not truly represent who they are.

Meanwhile, true identity is the honest and authentic expression of a person's inner self, including their values, abilities, and personality. It reflects a state in which individuals act in alignment with who they really are, regardless of external pressures. This concept often appears in discussions about personal growth, self-acceptance, and psychological well-being.

## 5. True Self

The true self reveals a person's authentic identity, values, and desires, which may diverge from societal expectations. It represents the inner self that seeks personal fulfillment and authenticity, often conflicting with imposed roles or norms.

In *Mulan*, her true self reflects her natural personality, characterized by bravery, activity, and a deep connection to her inner strength, or *chi*. However, she is forced to suppress this side of herself in order to conform to the traditional gender roles expected of her as a woman.

## 6. Individual Psychology

In this study, individual psychology serves as the primary theoretical framework for analyzing *Mulan's* psychological journey. Developed by Alfred Adler, this theory explores how individuals are primarily driven by a desire to connect socially and to continuously improve themselves in pursuit of personal growth and superiority through a unique set of motivations and internal goals (Hoffman, 2024). The key concepts used in this research include:

- **Inferiority Feelings:** A natural and healthy feeling of inadequacy experienced by humans becomes the basis for individuals to grow, develop, and strive toward meaningful goals.
- **Striving for Superiority:** An innate drive to grow, succeed, and overcome feelings of inferiority through personal achievement.

- Fictional Finalism: A self-created goal or ideal that guides an individual's behavior and decisions.
- Style of Life: A person's unique way of acting and dealing with problems is formed from childhood experiences and personal choices.
- Creative Power: The individual's ability to shape their life and personality consciously.
- Social Interest: A person's sense of belonging and commitment to contribute to the well-being of others and society.

## 7. Psychological development

Psychological development refers to the inner growth and changes in a person's thoughts, feelings, and identity, especially when they face challenges from their surroundings. In this study, psychological development is explored through Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology by examining how Mulan deals with social expectations, makes conscious decisions, and gradually embraces her true self and sense of belonging in society.

### A.7 Organization of the Research Report

This research is organized into five chapters. **Chapter I: Introduction** explains the background of the research, research problems, objectives, significance, limitations, definitions of key terms, and the research organization. **Chapter II: Review of Literature** presents a comprehensive review of theories and approaches relevant to the study, focusing on psychological theories applied to analyze Mulan's character. **Chapter III: Research Methodology** describes the type of research, data

sources, data collection methods and techniques, and data analysis methods.

**Chapter IV: Data Analysis** describes the data, analysis, and discussion of the main character's struggle against societal expectations in Disney's film *Mulan (2020)* from a psychological perspective. Lastly, **Chapter V: Conclusion and Suggestion** summarizes the main findings of the research and offers recommendations for future studies in a related area.

