

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

The topic of my thesis is Concept of Balance Found in *MULAN* and *MULAN 2* VCD Cover: A Study of Semiotics. I choose this topic because the movie is included in one of the ten most successful and popular Walt Disney's movies (*Disney Movies Guide*). The movie is based on ancient Chinese culture and philosophy. I will use semiotics, as it is a branch of linguistics that studies the meaning of signs. According to Daniel Chandler in his *Semiotics: the Basic*, Semiotics is "the study of signs" and a sign is anything which "stands for something else" (2). I believe that this cover stands for something else, in this case, Chinese value of balance.

As my data is in the form of pictures or images, I believe that pictures or images have the function to communicate ideas to other people from different countries as imagery is "language that produces pictures in the minds of people reading or listening" (Hornby). Thus, pictures, images, musics and other things are the media in which the communication process happens. In that way, pictures can be used to communicate with other people whose cultures, languages, nations, race and religions are different as long as they can see and understand

the message in them.

A cover from a VCD or DVD or CD or magazine or any media has the function not only to show the characters, the title and 'hints' about the story of the movie but also to communicate ideas, philosophy, beliefs, and so on. The more attractive the covers are, the more the people will be attracted to the covers and to know the content of the VCD, DVD, VCD or other medias. Thus, the covers have the function to transfer information what the movies are about to the people. Accordingly, the covers act as the media.

Media, in this case the VCD cover, is the language that makes the communication happen as the cover can tell the readers or the viewers about the philosophy and belief without them realizing it. By using the cover, the message and the concept of the movie are being represented. Not many people bother to search for the message and the concept except those who are interested in it. Thus Semiotics, as the study of signs, will help those who are interested in searching for the message and the concept of the signs.

In order to analyze the VCD cover, I use semiotic theories. My analysis will be based on Saussure's and Barthes' theories which I believe will help me to reveal the balance concept in *MULAN* VCD Cover. The media which I would like to analyze in this thesis are two VCD covers; *MULAN* and *MULAN 2*.

The movie *MULAN* is an American animated film produced by Walt Disney Feature Animation. Walt Disney is the most popular animation and cartoon movies producer in the whole world (IMDb – *Internet Movie Database*). Thus, I am interested to find out the concept in the cover. As the film is based on the Chinese legend Hua Mulan who lived approximately before the Tang Dynasty ("Hua Mulan"), I will relate my whole analysis to Chinese ancient tradition and culture.

Hua Mulan is a legend about a female warrior that was written in *The Ballad of Mulan / Ode of Mulan*. It is said that Mulan lived in the Wei, Sui, or Tang Dynasties (no one knows the exact time and place when and where she lived approximately around 500 – 600 A.D). The ballad tells about a daughter of an old and frail retired general who cut her hair short, dressed in his father's armour and disguised herself as a man so that she was able to replace his father's position to go to the warfare. She became the heroine for her country as well as her family ("Hua Mulan").

I choose this cover because it is the only movie among Walt Disney's movies, besides *MULAN 2*, that tells a story about a Chinese heroine. *MULAN* is also one of the many Walt Disney's movies that show a woman as the strong and unfeminine woman while other movies depicted women as beautiful, relentless and waiting-for-the-right-prince-to-come princesses. I also believe that there are a lot of Chinese values and philosophy that are inserted into this movie. My analysis will be about the way the cover shows the ancient Chinese value and philosophy about balance (Yin-Yang). Yin-Yang is the value of the unity of two totally different things in order to create the balance system in the whole universe. The acceptance of either side of lives is obligatory to prevent the unbalanced life. The totally different sides are for example; the bad and the good, men and women, rich and poor, and so on ("Yin and Yang Meaning").

In my opinion, Walt Disney, as a Western film Production Company has some intentions by portraying the Yin-Yang belief through a Chinese legend, Mulan. From (*IMDb – Internet Movie Database*), it is said that "Mulan is the first movie that tells about an Asian heroine. This was originally planned as an animated short entitled "China Doll" about an oppressed and miserable Chinese

girl who is whisked away by a British Prince Charming to happiness in the West. Then Disney consultant and children's book writer 'Robert San Souci' suggested making a movie of the Chinese poem, 'The Song of Fa Mu Lan', so the 2 projects were combined" (*IMDb - Internet Movie Database*).

The movie was also produced to smooth over the relations between the Chinese government and Walt Disney Feature Animation Company following the upset that had been caused by the Disney-funded release of *Kundun*. *Kundun* is a movie about the oppression and other problems that Tibet's 14th Dalai Lama has had to suffer from his childhood until his adulthood caused by the Chinese government (*IMDb - Internet Movie Database*).

I believe the significance of my study is that by reading this analysis, the readers will be able to realize that a picture from a VCD cover has a meaning, which is not only to communicate what the movie is about, but also to communicate the belief and philosophy about certain things. People tend to look at the cover of a movie as only a piece of art but actually it may have more meanings than what it shows. By reading this analysis, I hope people will look at covers of VCD not only as pieces of arts but also as meaningful parts that contain messages and symbolism. I also believe that by reading this analysis people can be more aware of signs around them. I also hope that people will realize that everything they see contains signs and messages that if those signs are analysed further, they can symbolize something, which is more than what they see.

**1.139 words**

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

In this thesis, I would like to analyse the following problems:

1. What are the linguistic signs represented in *MULAN* and *MULAN 2* VCD cover?
2. How do the signs create the concept of balance?
3. How do the signs represent Chinese and Western values?

## **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

In this thesis I intend:

1. to show what linguistic signs are represented in *MULAN* and *MULAN 2* VCD cover.
2. to analyze how the signs create the concept of balance.
3. to prove how the signs represent Chinese and Western values.

## **1.4 Method of Research**

The method used is library research. Firstly, I began the research by finding and searching for the theories of semiotics in the library. Secondly, I searched and selected some VCD covers of cartoon movies. Thirdly, I gained some more information from the Internet and the books about the history of Mulan and the culture in ancient China to support my analysis. I analyzed the cartoon VCD cover using semiotic theory. At last, I wrote my thesis.

## **1.5 Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter One is the Introduction, which contains the Background of the Study, Statement of the Problems, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research, and Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two is the Theoretical Framework, in which I present the definition and the elaboration of the semiotics theory that I use to analyze the data. Chapter Three is the analysis of the VCD covers. Chapter Four, which is the last chapter in my analysis, will be the conclusion of the analysis. The Bibliography and the Appendices will be presented at the end of the analysis.