Who Said Women Can't Fight? A Comparison of the Female Characters in *Princess Mononoke* and The Traditional Japanese Woman

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Abstract. Studio Ghibli has been known to produce animated films that tackle various important topics such as environmentalism, war, and Japanese history. These films also focus on female narratives and showcase strong and independent female characters who do not exhibit the stereotypical characteristics of traditional Japanese women, most of whom have secondary positions in many films. This research paper aims to determine if the female portrayals in the Studio Ghibli film *Princess Mononoke* reflect the traditional characteristics of a Japanese woman. It employed qualitative content analysis in comparing and contrasting the individual traits of the main and supporting characters and identified whether these conform to those of a traditional Japanese woman. This includes deductive approach/priori coding, which uses pre-established categories and quotes from the film to determine if the film's characters apply to such. While Princess Mononoke (San), Lady Eboshi, and the film's supporting characters personify the cultural and traditional settings of 14th-century Japan, they concurrently show their strength, courage, and decisiveness – characteristics that can be considered empowering. Future studies may survey whether these portrayals can be seen in other anime and examine their alignment with specific female images from Japanese history.

Keywords. *anime, gender studies, content analysis, Japanese women*

Background of the Study

Japan is known to be a "man's country" where "tradition has concentrated political, economic, cultural, and educational power into predominantly male hands" (Iles, 2005). In contrast to how the country views men, women are expected to be submissive and weak. According to the Confucian ethic, women are bound to three "obediences"; they are expected to be bound to their fathers, husbands, and children (Iwao, 1993). These "obediences" support the notion that traditional Japanese women are meant to be family-oriented. Similarly, European ideals in the late 1900s showed women focused on their roles to contribute to their families and their state – then influencing the first introduction of the term *ryosai kenbo* in Japan. Translating to the phrase "good wife, wise mother", the ideology of *ryosai kenbo* implicates the supposed roles of Japanese women tied to their families (Sakamoto, 2014, p. 159). This idealized dependency goes with the phrase "*Nagare ni mi o makaseru*" which translates to "go with the flow" and expresses the loss of a woman's autonomy in the presence

of others because of societal norms in Japan (Iwao, 1993). Such examples of Japan's views on women only help to reinforce the stereotypical weak and passive woman.

Review of Related Literature

Japanese Women through the Years

Several studies document the noticeable changes in the portrayed image of Japanese women in terms of their roles and values. This can be observed in three distinct periods of Japanese history: pre-war Japan, post-war Japan, and contemporary Japan.

The book *Becoming Modern Women: Love and Female Identity in Prewar Japanese Literature and Culture* by Suzuki (2010) discussed the typical roles that Japanese women played during the early periods of Japan and pre-war Japan. It was suggested that the image of the development of women was created during the first half of the twentieth century in Japan. By then, women were not given the liberty to develop their autonomy (Gulick, 1903, as cited in Suzuki, 2010). A woman was thought to go through the process of having an "innocent" same-sex love in the early stages of her life, only to move on from this and have "real" heterosexual love as she grows older. By having this love, she is expected to adopt the ideals set on a woman, such as being a *ryosai kenbo,* and follow Confucian ideals regarding family settings.

The most important change in the female image happened before the war, notably during the *Taisho* period, which lasted from 1912 to 1916 (Milhaupt, 2014; Hastings, 1993; Thordarson, 2018). Modernism was strongly associated with the female gender since pre-war women were most active in changing their image. According to Hiratsuka Raicho, one of the most influential feminists in Japan, women were considered to be the non-normative sex, while men were the normative sex. Raicho's work *Seito* (1911), the first Japanese feminist journal, writes that women should first start "becoming a true person" (*honto no mono ni naru koto*) to make significant changes in society (Suzuki, 2010, p.5).

According to Sato (2003), significant changes in the views of Japanese women occurred during interwar Japan when a new image of Japanese women was formed. Women in media were given less domestic roles such as a "cafe waitress, housewife, dancer, shop girl" (Sato, 2003, p.1) and were portrayed as "prominent icons of the modern city" in books and movies. This change in portrayal then deviates from the notion of *ryosai kenbo,* and the presence of women in the labor workforce, where female labor spanned mostly within the textile and agriculture industry in interwar Japan (Hunter, 1990, p. 108-109).

In contemporary times, the stereotypical image of the "modern girl, new type of middle-class housewife, and the professional working woman" (Sato, 2003, p.8) was not solely representative of Japanese women as a whole. While the media may have had a large influence on the creation of these images and identities, Sato argued that the actions of women themselves also shaped these. The study also covered the media's portrayal of the modern girl with two narratives: a "sexual and social decadence: an unfaithful wife, the prostitute, and the cafe hostess" (Sato, 2003) or a professional working woman, which is patterned after the previous images of women and their identities.

Portrayal in Different Forms of Media

Aside from the aforementioned portrayals of women in books, other studies have reviewed gender representations in different types of Japanese media, such as advertisements, Japanese comics (*manga*), and *anime*. Such observations and results from this related literature can provide better insights into the disparity among gender representations in various media types.

In the study by Ford et al. (1998) that examined 483 advertisements from 13 different Japanese magazines, 282 had female central figures, and the rest, 191, had male central figures. According to previous research on Japanese media and literature, the stereotypes of women in Japan are based on Japan's values, and "if media are a reflection of culture, it is reasonable to expect to find indigenous stereotypes depicted" (Ford et al., 1998, p. 114). The traits found in the advertisements were similar to previously identified Japanese gender traits and mannerisms of women, some of them being

devoted, obliging, and rattle-brained. Ford et al.'s study (1998) then highlights how the portrayal of women in media, such as advertisements, reflects Japanese traditional values and ideals.

Another form of media that portrays the usual gender stereotypes of Japanese women is *manga*. At the beginning of the creation of *manga*, stories did not typically revolve around girls. Those that did were considered "second-class literature" as women-centric comics were not as popular.

In the 1920s, *shoujo mangas* (girl's comics) emerged. These comics were first made by male *mangakas* (*manga* artists) and mostly revolved around the romantic story of a girl in various settings, for example, the then-famous *shoujo manga*, *Ribbon Knight Mahou Shoujo* by Osamu Tezuka. This narrative restriction of female characters placed women back in their stereotypical submissive role and did not accurately represent most of their feelings. This motivated women in the 1950s to become *mangakas* themselves and to start making comics that show their own perspectives (Liu, 2010).

In recent *shoujo mangas* and *anime*, more complex femininity has been shown in female characters with both "mother-like" and independent personalities. Choo (2008) talks about how Tsukushi in *Hana Yori Dango* and Toru in *Fruits Basket*, could have lived more comfortable domestic lives but instead chose to be independent and go through struggles while still showing domesticity as they act as mothers in the way they care for other characters. The study further discusses how these struggles between work and family could reflect the struggles of the shows' creators.

Choo (2008) added that the confusion in portraying a traditional woman or a modern woman (or even a mixed one) in *anime* comes from women's problems in that period. In the 1980s, *shoujo anime* mainly featured female characters who actively tried to pursue higher roles because of the lack of female representation in those positions. However, in the 1990s, female creators wanted to go back to traditional femininity because the emergence of males in female-dominated areas led to them being labeled as "feminized males" instead. Due to women's pressure at the time, female artists wanted to show more motherly and domestic characters – a role that they considered not even "feminized males" could perform since it was traditionally intended for females. These studies by Liu (2010) and Choo (2008) showed how the portrayal of female characters in *shoujo manga* progressed from a limited to a broader scope when more women became comic artists.

In contrast to women's portrayals in *shoujo manga*, Nishiyama (2016) observed more limited portrayals of femininity in popular *shounen manga* as they contained fewer key female characters. Often, traditional female roles and narrow gender norms were depicted in *shounen manga* as they reflect the misogynistic ideals and views put on women – as seen in female characters who had bodies that did not conform to the "ideal" body type and were given ridicule under the guise of humor. Along with these portrayals, female characters with careers had limited representations in *shounen manga* as they were either excluded from the workforce or treated as "too masculine," and shows how women's careers were treated as "temporary and hence not as serious" (Nishiyama, 2016, p. 102). The popular series *Gintama* also mostly showed female characters who worked in "feminine industries" (Nishiyama, 2016, p. 102), such as the entertainment industry, as a model, hostess, or prostitute. Additionally, the study observed that *shoujo* and *shounen mangas* showcased female characters subordinate to men. They were viewed as "weak, dependent, and helpless," which were traits of a traditional Japanese woman.

Some of the roles of female characters shown in *shounen manga* include the independent woman, the cute woman, and the superheroine. The independent woman is often seen as "financially independent and free to pursue her dream career." However, Nishiyama (2016) observed that comics often show this independence at the price of the character's loneliness and unhappiness, as seen in the case of Nana from *NANA*. On the other hand, the "cute woman" is characterized as naive, childlike, and lacking intelligence. An example is Misa from *Death Note* who is often not taken seriously by the male characters and is even given the term "dumb blonde". Lastly, the "superheroine" character is portrayed as someone who "possesses superhuman strength." Some consider this as the "key form of female empowerment in *shounen manga*," but Nishiyama (2016) finds this contradictory to the fact that the characters' super strength is unrealistic and that the characters are often shown to abandon femininity to achieve this. According to Nishiyama (2016), these roles limit the portrayal of female characters and exhibit "false feminism."

In a more recent study by Reysen et al. (2017), it was observed that some *anime* genres are frequently seen to exhibit sexist themes, such as sexual harassment and the objectification of women.

According to the ratings from an *anime* website, *MyAnimeList.net,* the research observed nine popular anime series and found that across the 45 episodes included, 243 (33.2%) of the characters were female and 489 (66.8%) were male. Results have shown that the portrayal of female characters was expected to be more sexualized than male characters (Reysen et al., 2017). Secondly, it was observed that female main characters were more objectified compared to secondary female characters. They were shown to be more curvaceous and were dressed to be more sexualized. Reysen et al.'s study (2017) shows that the portrayal of women – whether in leading or supporting roles – in more recent *anime* still follows the aforementioned stereotypes and exhibits sexist themes.

Choo's (2008) and Nishiyama's (2016) studies showed how the portrayal of women in *shoujo* and *shounen mangas* differ from each other and Reysen et al.'s (2017) study depicts more recent portrayals of women in terms of physical traits and mannerisms. The information gathered from these studies can provide significant help in analyzing and comparing the female characters in the film that will be used in this study, Princess Mononoke.

The Contrasting Portrayals of Japanese Women

In general, studies reinforce that the portrayal of Japanese women in the media has changed over time but still kept some traditional views (Ford et al., 1998; Liu, 2010; Choo, 2008; Nishiyama, 2016; Reysen et al., 2017) . During the pre-war period, women conformed to traditional stereotypes–mostly maternal and domestic roles–and took charge of liberating themselves from this during and after the war. Women then gained more independent roles and broadened their image. This progression of portrayal is shown throughout different forms of media–books, films, advertisements, *mangas*, and *anime*–from different time periods. Hence, these studies can provide information on how female characters in Studio Ghibli films break or reinforce these stereotypes and whether or not these films draw an empowering image for younger women.

Despite how these examples support these ideals, *anime* can also be a pivotal point to change the audience's perspective on newer ideas that have become more common (Napier, 2001). For instance, multiple female characters—whether leading or supporting—shown in Studio Ghibli films seem to represent character traits that do not conform entirely to the gender roles that "traditional Japanese women" are supposed to have. These films "dismantle much of what is seen in cool Japan ideology, where young women are allowed to be 'cute, feminine, and fun', but also must be cooperative and docile" (Feminism and Studio Ghibli, 2015, p.5). Instead, such positive representations greatly empower younger female audiences to be more confident with self-expression. These representations in media can be used to establish gender roles, as these play an essential role in how the youth interact with society (Lindsey, 2016).

Hayao Miyazaki, a founder of Studio Ghibli Productions, creates stories where female characters undergo personal character growth and development. This can be seen in his Academy award-winning film *Spirited Away* (2001), wherein Ogino Chihiro, the film's 10-year-old female protagonist, goes against the usual portrayal of female characters by saving the male lead Haku, and her parents in the end (Iles, 2005). *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984), an older film, also exhibits the development of the main character Nausicaä as she saves her planet. While both films were considered, there have already been notable studies that observe the cultural and feminist themes within *Spirited Away.* In comparison, the film *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* had fewer studies that observe these themes but had few notable female main characters.

Princess Mononoke (1997), set in 14th-century Japan (Kelly, 2022), shows the development of its two main female characters, Princess Mononoke (protagonist) and Lady Eboshi (antagonist), along with a notable supporting character, Moro. Compared to the aforementioned films, fewer notable studies discuss the film's feminist and cultural themes and the correlation between the two. Moreover, while previous studies focused on more mainstream and popular anime, this paper focuses on a Studio Ghibli production, which has several notable differences from the former. For one, their films are all hand-drawn, employing techniques from traditional Japanese comics. Their characters are also more nuanced and complex, and they seamlessly interweave the realistic with the fantastical (Villano, 2023). This study offers a fresh contribution to literature about female representation in Japanese media productions, particularly anime.

Statement of the Problem

There seems to be a contrast between the maternal roles given to Japanese women and the traits of female characters from the Studio Ghibli film, *Princess Mononoke*. With this, the paper aims to address the question, "Do the female characters from the Studio Ghibli film *Princess Mononoke* reinforce the stereotypes of traditional Japanese women?" and to help further define this: "What are the similarities and differences between *Princess Mononoke*'s female characters and the stereotypical 'traditional Japanese women' in terms of traits or characteristics?"

Objective and Significance of the Study

The paper's main objective is to determine whether the portrayal of female characters from the film *Princess Mononoke* reinforces the stereotypical image of Japanese women. As there is already a notable number of studies that discuss the themes of feminism in Studio Ghibli films, this study then aimed to observe whether certain portrayals align with more stereotypical and misogynist themes.

Methods

Qualitative content analysis was used as the study's primary methodology. For this particular study, the framework used, based on a study by Krippendorff (1989), was used to analyze and interpret *Princess Mononoke*. This is consistent with the methods used in past studies involving female representation in Japanese media productions. For instance, Ford et al. (1998) and Reysen et al. (2007) used content analysis to establish patterns in portraying contemporary Japanese women in their respective studies on Japanese advertisements and anime. Liu (2010), on the other hand, used multimodal discourse analysis to investigate the shoujo mangas Sailor Moon and Magic Knight Rayearth, taking into account not just the story and the dialogue but also the images, symbols, and colors. Nishiyama (2016) and Choo (2008) likewise used discourse analysis in their respective studies.

The current study used deductive approach/priori coding, which is an approach that predetermines the keywords, categories, or variables from the data and proceeds to sift this information according to these variables. These categories were established before the analysis based on some theory (Stemler & Steve, 2000, p. 2). Following this, the study also used intercoder validity or "reproducibility," which was applied to studies with multiple coders. In particular, three rounds of coding were done to ensure the credibility of the results. The categories were drawn from the insights presented in the literature review of this paper.

Characters referenced as male or had he/him pronouns were counted as male, and those with she/her pronouns were counted as female. Characters without any references to their gender or who had no lines were not included.

The female characters were identified as primary, supporting, or extra. Princess Mononoke (San), the female lead who resolves the film's central conflict, was counted as a significant character (Smith et al., 2016). Along with San, the main antagonist who hinders Mononoke's goal, Lady Eboshi, is also counted as a major character (Fahraeus & Yakali-Camoglu, 2011; Jurgensmeyer, 2019). Female characters accompanying the protagonists or the antagonists (e.g., Moro, Toki, and the village women) were placed into the supporting character group.

The major female characters were analyzed in the following categories based on the stereotypical portrayal of female characters in *anime* that reflect the traits of traditional Japanese women: Confucian ethic/*Ryosai kenbo*, emotional, dependent, cooperative, submissive, social position, curvaceous/sexual. A coding sheet, adapted from Wiersma (2000), containing the categories that fit in the areas and the list of characters to be evaluated, was used.

Each category was further defined using the aforementioned sources and specific quotes referring to or said by the character. Quotes that support the definition of the category were denoted using the symbol (+), while those that provided contrasting evidence used (-).

The characters' relationships were patterned after Yu's (2015) description of women who play the roles of mothers, sisters, and occasionally girlfriends in a secondary position along with the

definition of *ryosai kenbo* by Iwao (1993), which is a "good wife, wise mother." The character's social status was defined as their rank based on honor or prestige (Britannica, 2023).

Next, the trait of being dependent was defined, wherein women were presented as weak and dependent on men, seeking a man if unmarried or being nurturing mothers and wives (Yu, 2015). Their cooperativeness was defined as having relationships that involve mutual assistance in working toward a common goal (Oxford Dictionary, 2024). Their submissiveness/compliance was defined as the characters being obedient to the authority of others (Oxford Dictionary, 2024).

Their physical attributes, such as weakness, were defined as the character's inability to resist external force or withstand attack (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2024). Their appearances of being more curvaceous or sexual were based on their appearance in the film—whether they were "scantily clad" or wearing very little clothing (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024).

The female characters' behaviors were compared and contrasted to those of a traditional Japanese woman — dependent, cooperative, and submissive (Yu, 2015). Their physical attributes were also analyzed to see if they are similar to the traditional female characters in Japanese films who are sexualized and portrayed as physically weak (Nishiyama, 2016; Reysen et al., 2017). These interpretations helped the researchers conclude if the Studio Ghibli film reinforces the stereotypes of traditional Japanese women.

Words and sentences from a character's lines were coded according to whether they fit into one of the categories. Each coder viewed the film once for initial coding, and then the transcript was coded individually. A second round of coding was conducted after one week to catch codes that were missed and note important emerging themes not included in the list of categories. A third coder, the third author, revisited the results and examined them again against the anime.

After the three rounds, the coders compared coding sheets and notes to interpret the data gathered and make conclusions. The social ranking of the female characters was then compared to that of the male characters, who were usually found to be in a higher position (Nishiyama, 2016).

Results and Discussion

The summary of codes from the content analysis *Princess Mononoke* is shown in the table below:

Table 1
Content Analysis of the Female Characters of Princess Mononoke

	Lady Eboshi	Princess Mononoke	Moro and Supporting Characters
RELATIONSHIP			
Confucian Ethic/Ryosai kenbo (Iwao, 1993) Tied to three obediences: father, husbands and children		(+) "I'm sure she'll make a lovely wife for you" - Lady Eboshi (+) "The girl is San, my daughter." - Moro (+) "You are Moro's human child aren't you? I've heard of you." - Okkoto	(+) "This girl San, is my daughter." (+) "Instead of eating her, I raised her as my own. Now, my poor, ugly, beautiful daughter is neither human nor wolf." (+) "Give me back my daughter, demon." (+) "They're just pups. Wait till you see her mother." - Lady Eboshi
Social Status (Nishiyama, 2016)	(+) "Milady is kind after all."- Villager (+) "She is the only one who saw us as human beings. We are lepers." - Osa (+) "Nobody treats my Lady Eboshi like that!" - Villager	(+) "Princess of the spirits of ghouls, beasts, and ancient gods." - Lady Eboshi	(+) Moro is considered as an ancient god.

	(+) It's Lady Eboshi's Irontown" - Kohroku Often referred to as "ma'am, ladyship and milady"		

BEHAVIOUR			
Dependent (Yu, 2015, p. 33) "Weak and dependent on men, seeking a man if unmarried or being nurturing mothers and wives."	(-) "Remember, you can't trust men." (+) "Ashitaka. Can someone find him? I need to thank him." (After being saved by him)	(-) "I had a dream that San was by my side, nursing me." - Ashitaka (-) "Ashitaka, can you save the girl you love?"- Moro (-) "Amazing. The wolves and that crazy little Wolf Girl helped save us all." - Villager	(-) "The women are on their own now. They can take care of themselves." - Lady Eboshi (-) "And who made the iron that paid for that rice? Tell me that.", "Yeah, we're pumping those bellows while you pigs are in bed." - Village women (In response to: "Look woman! We risked our lives to bring you the rice, so watch your mouth." - Village man)
Cooperative (Condry, 2015)	(+) "Here it is! One head, as promised!" (+) "Stay here. Help me kill the forest spirit, Ashitaka."	(-) "No! You're on their side! You always were!" - San (In response to: "San you've got to help us." - Ashitaka)	
Submissive/Comp liant	*Lady Eboshi is known to command others instead of receiving the orders. (-) "Everybody out of the way! Riflemen, get ready to fire!" (-) "Stay back." (-) "Don't let the oxen panic! Take up your positions!"	(-) "No! You're on their side! You always were!"	

PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES			
Weak (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) "not being able to resist external force or withstand attack"	(-) "I'm getting a little bored of this curse of yours, Ashitaka. Let me just cut the damn thing off!"	(-) "I'm not afraid to die." (-) "There's no one who can stop me from killing her." (-) "Give her to me! I'll cut her throat!"	(-) "Then I would have bitten your head off to silence you." (-) "I listen to the forest's pain and feel the ache of the bullet in my chest, and I dream of the day when I will finally crunch that gun woman's head in my jaws." (-) "The women are on their own now. They can take care of themselves." - Lady Eboshi
More curvaceous/sexual (Reysen et al., 2017)	(-) Wears layered and loose clothing.	(-) Wears sleeveless attire that reaches above her knees, but the clothing itself does not accentuate her figure.	(-) The village women wear loose clothing that reaches above their knees, but the clothing itself does not accentuate their figures. (+) The village women's cleavages can be seen from their clothing. (Moro) N/A: Since this character is an animal, this category cannot be applied.

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Princess Mononoke

San, also known as Princess Mononoke, is the female lead character of the film. San is the adoptive daughter of Moro, also known as the Wolf God, who took her under her care when she was abandoned as a child.. However, her role as a daughter comes second to her being the protagonist and does not define her entire character. Neither was she playing a secondary role as Ashitaka's love interest despite having several romantic interactions. Despite being interested in him, she does not pursue Ashitaka and focuses solely on her responsibilities as a forest guardian. San's rebellious nature can be seen in both the film's plot and her characterization. Her traits can be seen as rejecting the ideal traditional Japanese woman. She prioritizes her own ideals instead of being meek or cooperative and has many displays of her own strength.

In terms of social status, San is called "princess" multiple times by various characters and has an unofficial title of the "princess of the spirits of ghouls, beasts, and ancient gods," as mentioned by Lady Eboshi, which does not ascribe to her a lower status compared to her counterpart Ashitaka, a prince of his village. She is also respected by the other wolves despite being a human, their "natural" enemy, as shown in the film. San is deemed a respected figure within her clan, and her clan members follow her orders willingly and cooperate with her as she battles Lady Eboshi.

Mostly independent, she relies on herself during fights and even offers assistance to the characters in the film instead ("Amazing. The wolves and that crazy little Wolf Girl helped save us all"). However, there are also times when she needs to be rescued, such as when she gets stuck in Okkoto, which could be interpreted as her being dependent. Despite this, it is essential to note that her dependency in these scenarios is situational, given that she was seen to be physically incapable of helping herself. With this, it can be deduced that San's character is independent and does not conform to the behavior of a dependent woman.

Her stubbornness leads to her being mostly uncooperative with Ashitaka because she thinks he is against her actions ("No! You're on their side! You always were!"). In the end, she is only willing to cooperate to get the Forest Spirit's head back because she realizes they are no longer on opposing sides. With this, it can also be said that San is not submissive or compliant like traditional Japanese women. An instance is when she does not follow Ashitaka's warning to stay on the roof of the village and instead barrels down toward the fight.

As mentioned earlier, San is involved in fights with various people ("There's no one who can stop me from killing her.", "Give her to me! I'll cut her throat!") but is strong enough to hold her own and is only defeated when Ashitaka renders her unconscious. Another physical trait of San that goes against the traditional Japanese woman is her way of clothing. As she identifies herself as part of the wolf clan instead of a human, she wears clothes that try to mimic her family. Throughout the film, she wears a sleeveless dress with a tank top layered over. She is not provocatively clad, like the usual portrayal of Japanese women, since her dress reaches below her knees and sometimes wears a fur coat over it.

With these observations, it can be said that San does not conform to the stereotypical portrayal of traditional Japanese women. She does not fulfill all of the Confucian ethics and is seen as equal to her male counterpart regarding her social position. It can even be said that she contradicts the usual traits, behaviors, and physical attributes of a traditional Japanese woman, as pointed out by Suzuki (2010), Milhaupt (2014), and Thordarson (2018). This is made clear when directly comparing San to these stereotypical ideals as listed in the coding sheet: commits more to her own ideals than her family's, is seen as an equal or above others due to her unofficial princess title, and is not at all dependent, cooperative, or submissive as she is stubborn and relies on herself, and she is not portrayed as weak or provocative.

Lady Eboshi

Lady Eboshi is known to be San's rival; though portrayed as an antagonist, her motives are caused mainly by her drive to protect and provide for her people. The town's women are seen to be especially loyal to Lady Eboshi, as they follow her mannerisms of being independent from the help of men. Her character mostly goes against the image of an ideal traditional Japanese woman. She is

seen as a strong and commanding leader, putting herself and Irontown above all, not showing dependence or submissiveness.

Throughout the film, there is no indication of her having any familial ties, which implies that she is not tied to the three obediences according to the Confucian ethic. However, in terms of her social status, she is described as the revered mistress of the Irontown ("It's Lady Eboshi's Irontown, "as said by Kohroku, her right-hand man), as seen in multiple scenes in the film where she is called high titles such as "ma'am, ladyship, and milady" by the village people. Hence, this signifies her playing the role of the head of a family—which is a role that is usually played by males.

Her character is primarily independent, as she usually does not tend to rely on others ("Remember, you can't trust men.") unless she is faced with a dire situation where she needs the assistance of other people, as seen in the scene where the Forest Spirit bit her arm off and when Ashitaka saved her ("Ashitaka. Can someone find him? I need to thank him."). In addition, Lady Eboshi is seen to be cooperative only when she would benefit from the deal, such as her deal with Jigo to retrieve the Forest Spirit's head in exchange for manpower ("Here it is! One head, as promised!"). In the film, she plays a leading role instead of a submissive one, as she usually commands her army or leads the villagers when faced with danger ("Everybody out of the way! Riflemen, get ready to fire!").

In terms of physical attributes, Lady Eboshi also does not show the weaknesses attributed to a traditional Japanese woman. She is not weak by any means, as she can withstand attacks from other people, as seen in her dispute with Ashitaka ("I'm getting a little bored of this curse of yours, Ashitaka. Let me just cut the damn thing off!"). Her physical appearance is also not considered to be curvaceous or sexual since her apparel consists of layers of loose clothing under her kimono that cover the majority of her body.

Thus, Lady Eboshi does not follow the stereotypes of a traditional Japanese woman regarding her relationships, behavior, and physical attributes. While there are few instances where she does follow these traits, these are only in circumstantial situations that require help from others.

Supporting Characters

Aside from these two main characters, the film also features female supporting characters, notably Moro and the other village women. While some characteristics, such as familial ties, are associated with conventional Japanese womanhood, they exhibit traits beyond being a respectful wife or a caring mother. These supporting characters have more familial ties than the main characters, as seen with the village women, who all have husbands. The only character with a maternal role in the film is Moro, who is the adoptive mother of San ("This girl San, is my daughter. Instead of eating her, I raised her as my own."). She is a wise mother who often advises San when she encounters troubles.

Moro is also seen to have saved San from danger despite already being weak. Aside from the two main characters, Moro is also the only other female character with a high social status as an ancient god. Along with Nago and Okkoto, the heads of the boar clan, she has an important role in leading her clan in protecting the forest.

The traits of the supporting characters also do not reflect that of traditional Japanese women. They are shown to be independent since the village women are also given weapons to defend the town when San arrives. They also successfully protected the town from Lord Asano's invading force while the men were away. Not only this but the village women are also seen to be cooperative when obeying Lady Eboshi's orders. However, when it comes to their husbands, they do not comply with their demands and are not submissive by any means ("And who made the iron that paid for that rice? Tell me that.", "Yeah, we're pumping those bellows while you pigs are in bed.").

Like San and Lady Eboshi, these supporting characters also face situations that require them to fight. Moro was portrayed to be strong as she was able to endure having a bullet through her chest after fighting with humans. When under attack, the village women were given the responsibility by Lady Eboshi to protect Irontown, with the words: "The women are on their own now. They can take care of themselves." Other than this, the village women's jobs were to pump the foot bellows to smelt iron, which required them to use their whole bodies to operate. In the film, the village women were seen only to be wearing one layer of clothing that reached their knees and showed their cleavages.

This means that the film's supporting characters do not resemble traditional Japanese women in terms of physical appearance and behavior. However, they do conform to these stereotypes in their relationships as they are tied to some form of familial relationship, whether it be as a mother or as a wife.

Conclusion

This research paper shows how the film, *Princess Mononoke*, does not conform to the stereotypical portrayal of females in ancient Japanese society. While female characters were usually found in powerless and subservient roles, the ones in the film were found to have power and authority. This can be seen in San, who was respected by the wolf clan despite being human and constantly proved that she earned her princess title. It is also evident in Lady Eboshi, who earned her rank by constantly protecting and helping her village instead of inheriting it traditionally through a family line. Even the supporting characters also counter the notion of a traditional Japanese woman. These portrayals of the film send a message that may empower the next generation of young female audiences also to pursue their own influential roles in modern society.

In addition, it can be seen that the two main female characters, San and Lady Eboshi are the main driving force of the narrative, as they embody two opposing themes of the film. Even though the film is seen through the perspective of Prince Ashitaka, he only acts as the central mediator between the two. The main events in the film are caused by the conflict between San and Lady Eboshi's motives. While it is seen at the end of the film that Ashitaka was able to negotiate between the two, the war was not ended by him but by the decisions of San and Lady Eboshi.

To conclude, the female characters from the film *Princess Mononoke* do not reinforce the stereotypes of traditional Japanese women. While still showing familial relationships (i.e., Moro and San's mother-daughter relationship), the ties of being a *ryosai kenbo* (Sakamoto, 2014) was not evident throughout the film as the characters were more focused on personal goals. Physical depictions of such characters were not sexualized as compared to other anime (Reysen et al., 2017), and their mannerisms differed from those advertised in the media (Ford et al., 1998).

As the study focuses on the characterizations of female characters rather than overarching themes, it provides more insight into the portrayal of female characters within the film while still taking contexts such as Japanese culture and history into account. Princess Mononoke's portrayals of its female characters provide evidence of changing media representation, as compared to earlier shoujo manga, which was known to show less variety in terms of femininity (Nishiyama, 2016), and in anime, where female characters were characterized through sexist themes (Reysen et al., 2017).

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