

# A Case Study on Habitual Gender Conceptions of Bilibili Anime Devotees: Notions of Traditional Masculinity, Femininity and Their Transformation

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## ABSTRACT

Recent studies on the fundamental aspects of gender stereotypes have raised public's concern in Chinese society, where social expectations are very prevalent and are exacerbated after watching certain television programs for both genders. This suggests that the traits are traditionally viewed as masculine, including assertiveness, upper body strength, and broad shoulders, while women are always depicted in roles pertaining to gentleness, expressiveness, and cuteness. Bilibili, a Chinese video-sharing website themed on animation and targeted at young people, arguably serves as a source of revelation for gender stereotypes of teenagers. So far, however, few studies have examined how adolescents' opinions on specific gender-stereotypes are transformed by certain streaming media content alike. Based on the comments and bullet screens collected from different Japanese animations on Bilibili platform, this paper explores the extent to which juveniles endorse those gender expectations. This study mainly focuses on a specific character named Bruno Bucciarati in the anime named *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure: Golden Wind*, and argues that the physical appearance and actions of the character incur the advent of fanart, fanfictions, and cosplays, which display him as a feminine image.

**Keywords:** *Gender Stereotypes, Anime, Bilibili, Bruno Bucciarati*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is widely accepted that the stereotypes are cognitive schemata that allows people to make generalizations about individuals based on their specific characteristics, traits, or attributes [1,2]. In China, reportedly, deep-seated gender stereotype that entrenches inequality between men and women still influences people's perception and behavior to varying degrees [3]. For example, "A lot of men have the expectation that they need to be stoic, independent, and take care of things on their own — and those can all be quite helpful tools" [4]. On the other hand, jobs like nurses and teachers are mostly dominated by women, indicating the existence of gender stereotypes.

Effects of anime on young people's stereotype endorsement have been attracting academic interest worldwide. Recently, there has been a growing interest in examining gender stereotypes in a children's television program. These studies have shown that television programs often transmit gender roles that affect kids'

mindset. "Results offer initial insights into how even short segments involving gender stereotypes in television shows can influence girls' and boys' stereotype endorsement" [5]. Nevertheless, few studies closely analyze how Chinese youngster's traditional gender stereotypes are revealed. The present study aims to investigate notions of masculinity and femininity held by users of Bilibili, which is largest anime streaming site in China and famous for "bullet comments" (or bullet screen, "dan'mu" in Chinese).

Bullet screen is a unique language for any streaming site: "In addition to viewing users' comments in another section, users may choose to integrate comment writing/reading with video watching experience. Comments will fly across the screen while videos are playing. On the occasion that the number of comments is too large, comments will cover the entire screen, making 'bullet comments' into 'bullet screens'" [6]. The function of bullet screen may not differ from the website comments, yet its interactivity provides a more sufficient way for younger viewers to get their opinions emerged in

the streaming content. Figure 1 is an example selected from the anime content.



**Figure 1** Screenshot from JoJo’s Bizarre Adventure: Golden Wind

The screenshot is taken from the first episode of the anime named JoJo’s Bizarre Adventure: Golden Wind, which will be the focal point of this paper. The image depicts the scene that two of the anime protagonists first meet each other. On the right side sits the man in the white suit, whose name is Bruno Bucciarati. Bullet comments, such as “beauty (refers to Bucciarati) in a sitting position”, “Sister Bu (the nickname for Bucciarati) looks like a villain at first” are simultaneously broadcasted in real-time, while there are not so many comments compared to other scenes that the screen is covered by comments entirely.

The real-time captioning system of the Bilibili (B site) also provides users with assorted bullet chat controls, including movement, format, and style. If viewers prefer to be fully concentrated rather than distracted by bullet comments, they can turn it off anytime easily. There are different categories of bullet chats offered by Bilibili: top comments, bottom comments, and rolling comments. For example, bullet comments in the screenshot incorporate both rolling comments and top comments. Besides, registered users of the B site can change the color of the bullet comments from white to other colors and choose bullet comments from small to big sizes. People are free to like bullet comments, and the bullet chat with most likes would have a thumb up icon next to it, just like the icon shown in the screenshot next to the comment “cherish the only time Bucciarati laughs”.

With the focus on this research topic, the author examined a plethora of comments and bullet screens posted under anime and videos on the B site, justifying different reasons for the emergence of gender-specific expectations based on solid evidence. “Anime is a word used by people living outside of Japan to describe cartoons or animation produced within Japan” [7]. Given the fact that most viewers of anime are young adults, it is assumed that results generated from the research could be an indication of youngsters’ gender stereotypes nowadays.

The aforementioned finding provides new insight into gender stereotypes among Chinese. Apart from

comments and bullet screens, anime on Bilibili gives rise to fanart, fanfictions, and cosplays. A large number of anime fans tend to metamorphose a male character into a female since the character has some feminine traits. This is especially true on Bilibili, where users upload multitudinous videos, articles, and drawings. This paper takes a closer look at fanfictions, fanart, and cosplays of one of the characters in JoJo’s Bizarre Adventure: Golden Wind, which is one of the most famous Japanese animations series offered by Bilibili. And the gender-related imaginations reflected upon those characters would be the main focus of the research.

Most importantly, this paper contributes to people’s understanding of gender stereotypes and gives an impetus for gender equality. The reader will have a more comprehensive idea about Chinese long-established notions of masculinity and femininity, and how the core values of young adults are revealed on the B site. Since B site comprises a majority of young adults and provides them a place to freely share their thoughts, and thus, it is representative in terms of youngsters’ thinking. Gleaned from concrete evidence, the author concludes that gender stereotype is common among Chinese teenagers and most of them are unconscious of that. Moreover, gender stereotypes determine men and women’s social roles at work, thereby it is crucial to learn the current situation of this topic.

## 2. FEMININE OUTFITS: SOCIAL STEREOTYPE EMBEDDED IN COSPLAYERS

“JoJo’s Bizarre Adventure is an epic tale, spanning from the end of the nineteenth century to the modern-day. The story follows the members of the Joestar family, who possess superhuman abilities that allow them to take down supernatural enemies. It’s a popular premise that has found fans in both its manga and anime iterations” [8]. JoJo’s Bizarre Adventure proved a huge bestseller, and it sells “over 100 million print copies” [8].

The exclusive broadcast right of Part V Golden Wind in China belongs to Bilibili. According to the data on the B site, 234 thousand users have commented on this animation, and it attains an extremely high score of 9.8 out of 10 in user rating. Compared to other Japanese animations with the same mark on Bilibili, it has attracted the most attention.

In light of this situation, JoJo’s Bizarre Adventure: Golden Wind is viewed as a representative work for its exceedingly large audience. This paper chooses one of the main characters, Bruno Bucciarati, and carefully analyzes his outfit. “Bruno Bucciarati is a supporting protagonist of JoJo’s Bizarre Adventure Part 5 (Golden Wind)” [9]. As shown in Figure 2, he appears as a mid-sized man with a slim build. He has black chin-length hair with straight-cut bangs covering his forehead. His hair is adorned with

a braid going along the top of his head and a hair clip surmounted on each side of his bangs. His attire is composed of an all-white suit covered in small black spoon-like symbols, with an open chest and zippers in random places. Underneath his jacket is a lace top, which is an indication of femininity.



Figure 2 Bruno Bucciarati

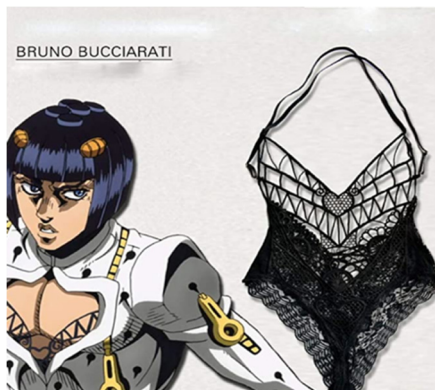


Figure 3 Jumpsuit sold on Amazon

Brand Name:cosplay legend  
 Item Type:Underwear  
 Source Type:anime  
 Gender:WOMEN  
 Characters:Bruno Bucciarati  
 Components:Top  
 Model Number:JoJo's Bizarre Adventure  
 Special Use:Costumes  
 Material:lance  
 tracking number:available  
 processing time:5-10 days  
 fast shipping:choose DHL,takes 3-7 days to US

Figure 4 Description of the jumpsuit

It is worth mentioning that Bucciarati wears a lace jumpsuit, and this underwear undeniably belongs to female outfits. According to Figure 3, some Chinese sellers on Amazon manufacture similar products that are very delicate cloth made with a lot of holes in them. As is showed in Figure 4, they assert that “women” are potential customers, directly revealing fans’ internal notions of femininity. Furthermore, the yellow hair accessories clipped on his hair are clues of femininity

because men seldom use them. Satirically, people are unconscious of their hidden gender stereotypes behind this character: a majority of anime buffs would unintentionally portray him as a female character. Most cosplayers of Bucciarati on Bilibili are females, who wear the underwear mentioned above and yellow accessories to fully represent this character. “Good cosplay reveals the pure love for an anime character that is at the heart of all cosplay, regardless of the gender of the cosplayer or the character being cosplayed. It takes a real man to dress like a 10-year-old girl!” [10]. Despite the fact that Bruno Bucciarati is a male, he presents some feminine characteristics through his outfit; consequently, females become predominant cosplayers of this character.

Arguably, a delicate issue is revealed through the fact that an increasing number of people give tacit consent to female cosplayers of Bucciarati. In the light of the fact that people unwittingly hold the belief that cosplayers of Bucciarati should be females because of the current phenomenon incurred by gender stereotypes, the male gaze is likely to take place. “The ‘male gaze’ invokes the sexual politics of the gaze and suggests a sexualized way of looking that empowers men and objectifies women. In the male gaze, a woman is visually positioned as an “object” of heterosexual male desire” [11]. Based on the given extract, gender stereotypes would have a negative externality on female cosplayers owing to male viewers’ “primordial wish for pleasurable looking” [12]. Recently, bullet comments like “it’s best to wear fewer clothes since Bucciarati exposes his chest” or “the quintessence of Bucciarati is the lace underwear, so the cosplayer should wear it” have sprung up like mushrooms after rain.



Figure 5 One of the female cosplayers on Bilibili

Based on this phenomenon, this paper concludes that anime fans on Bilibili hold deeply rooted notions of femininity. Given Bucciarati’s feminine traits, females are more likely to cosplay this character; seldom do people with masculine features become cosplayers of Bucciarati. Cosplayers, who take a fancy to copy a character’s exact look down to the details, perform this without realizing their social stereotypes.

### 3. GEN ZER'S LANGUAGE: NOTIONS OF MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY

A preponderance of Bilibili users is young adults. "As of the end of Q1 of 2020, an estimated 80 percent of Bilibili's 172 million users were aged 18 to 35, but the platform is known specifically for capturing China's Gen Zs" [13]. To be one of the users, people must first submit to a test of their familiarity with both the platform's code of conduct and the ACG (animation, comics, and games) culture that is Bilibili's bread and butter. After passing the exam, users can post content, including commenting on videos and contributing to bullet screens. Bullet screens, or bullet chats, characterize remarks layered on top of a video, scrolling horizontally across the screen while the video plays. "Although it looks messy at first glance, the experience has proved curiously compelling. In comparison with the traditional online video experience, where the viewer would switch between the video content itself and the comment thread directly below, the fast-paced bullet screen format inspires a sense of urgency and promotes rapid-fire exchanges between users" [14]. "According to Bilibili, 4.19 million bullet screens are sent out by Bilibili users every day. Understanding the bullet screen culture is a key step to understanding the platform" [14].

Aside from Golden Wind, the author gathered some popular comments and bullet chats, which precisely reveals people's hidden gender stereotype, from eminent animations provided by the B site, consisting of *That Time I Got Reincarnated as a Slime* and *Attack on Titan*. Moreover, anime fans on Bilibili give them masculine/feminine nicknames based on their characteristics.

To begin with, notions of femininity are held by most users of Bilibili. In *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure*, Bucciaratti is nicknamed "Sister Bu" by Chinese fans on Bilibili:

"Oh, Sister Bu is so perfect; he is a perfect son, a perfect leader, and a perfect subordinate. He has almost no black spot and no weakness. He is mature, calm, and principled. He also treats others gently"

"Sister Bu's gentleness is different from main characters in other stories. As a gangster, he fully understands how hard the work is and how bad gangsters are in the eyes of other people. Despite the fact that he is a gangster, every citizen greets him with respect since Sister Bu always treats them gently".

"No one would dislike Bucciarati, who looks like an unfeeling bully but rather a gentle person".

The above three sentences are directly translated based on fans' original words that are posted under different episodes of *Golden Wind*. In most cases, people would tend to use the adjective "gentle" to describe Bucciarati, whose most important character traits are righteousness and natural kindness. Bucciarati is

dedicated to taking the most honorable course of action, even if he puts his life at risk. "Even in this rotten world, I still want to walk down a path I believe in" (Bruno Bucciarati). According to gender expectations, one who embraces gentleness is often regarded as a feminine person.

There's also an episode about Bucciarati's past. When the image of the seven-year-old Bucciarati is shown, bullet screens like "Cutie! He has been a beauty since childhood" "Little Sister Bu is so adorable" quickly scroll across the screen. In the context of younger generation social norms on B site, "cute" is not used to portray a male unless he presents some feminine traits.

Last but not least, as Bucciarati reveals that his life has ended, a lot of fans sent out the bullet chat "the Most Famous Painting of the World", which is one of the most popular bullet screens meaning a famous or noble scene that touches Gen Zers' heart. "The Most Famous Painting of the World" somehow reminds the author of oil paintings of "the Virgin Mary", the eminently holy and sweet woman. The impression of anime fans on Bucciarati is thus exposed in front of people, suggesting that Bucciarati is rather feminine.

Throughout bullet chats and comments, users unanimously call him "Sister Bu". Given the fact that Bucciarati is a male, it is thought-provoking that people tacitly choose this sobriquet. To dig deeper, the author draws the conclusion that people's traditional notions of femininity result in this phenomenon.

In another Japanese animation, *That Time I Got Reincarnated as a Slime*, anime fans on Bilibili nicknamed the main character "the King of Cuteness", a relatively feminine name. The anime is about a salaryman who is murdered and reincarnates in a sword and sorcery world as a slime with unique powers and gathers allies to build his own nation of monsters. The protagonist used to be a middle-aged masculine man, while his appearance morphs into a long-haired, big-eyed child that has no visible male characteristics as he gets reincarnated. He is often mistaken for a young girl due to fans' notions of femininity such as cuteness and sweetness. Therefore, this character is viewed as another powerful evidence of anime fans' gender stereotypes.



**Figure 6** *That Time I Got Reincarnated as a Slime* | Rimuru Tempest

On the other hand, notions of masculinity are held by users. Mikasa Ackerman, one of the deuteragonists of Attack on Titan, is nicknamed “the Tough Guy”. Ackerman is made to look more feminine in the anime in the training part of season 1 and the season 2 opening, but she looks more like a tomboy than ever in season 4. This is because she has grown older and cut her hair. Moreover, she is quite stoic and level-headed, rarely seen to lose her cool or be at a loss of what to do, no matter how bleak the situation seems to be. Her remarkably strong will is a masculine trait: “Evidence suggests that men who strongly endorse masculine traits display an atypical presentation of depression, including more externalizing symptoms (e.g., anger or substance use), but fewer typical, internalizing symptoms (e.g., depressed mood or crying)” [15]. Consequently, fans’ notions of masculinity lead to the creation of this nickname.



Figure 7 Comparison of physical appearances of Mikasa Ackerman in different seasons

#### 4. HIDDEN ASPECTS OF GENDER STEREOTYPE: FANART AND FANFICTIONS

Fanart is “artwork based on popular works of fiction (such as books, movies, etc.) that is created by fans” [16]. Similarly, fanfictions are “stories involving popular fictional characters that are written by fans and often posted on the Internet” [16]. JoJo’s Bizarre Adventure is an A tier level of popularity on Bilibili and the fanbase is rabid and loud. The series has sold over “100 million copies” in print to date, making it one of the best-selling manga series in history, and it has spawned a media franchise including one-shot manga, light novels, and video games. Anime fans of the B site are fanatical creators who continuously upload original images and articles to take Bucciarati and manipulate him to make him more identifiable.

Interesting to note, Bucciarati is always portrayed as a female in fanart. His lace underwear, which exposes his pectorals, gives off feminine energy. In fanart, creators would depict him as a sexy woman with attires that expose the chest and back.

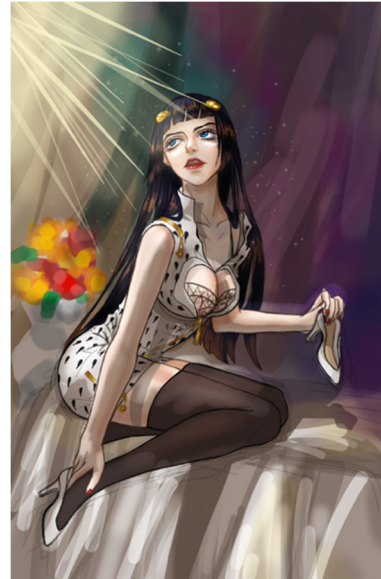


Figure 8 Fanart uploaded by users of Bilibili

The above pictures are two of the most popular artworks. The second picture depicts a romantic wedding scene that Bucciarati is holding Giorno Giovanna, the protagonist of Golden Wind, and staring into his eyes with the coyness of women. He wears the mermaid gown that exudes grace and elegance with his fitted waist and hips and gentle flare at knees. The veil that constructs swathes of intricate lace suggests his identity as a bride. There is no doubt that Bucciarati is portrayed as a female in those two images, and that triggers the speculation of what social aspects are hidden behind them. Traits traditionally cited as feminine include gracefulness, cuteness, and tenderness; due to the conventional stereotypes of femininity, fans firmly believe that Bucciarati is the “heroine” and thus render him the appearance of a female.

The below extract is from the fanfic ‘And I Shall Greet You with Love and Tears’:

“Bucciarati, are you happy now? Watch me in the dark, watch me go mad in pain because I miss you, or watch me regret because I have lost you again. Are you happy in this way?”

‘Why suffer alone when we have a chance to be happy?’

Giorno was already close at hand. His determination was like a tsunami, rising up ten meters high, destroying the sky and the earth, and there was no way but to surrender. Never, even in Bucciarati's lifetime, had he been so happy or so miserable. He soon realized that he had never really been alive since he had met Giorno.

One day, when Giorno finally realized that he had hurt him, he would blame the god who would not let him rest.

Catching a moment of thought, Giorno looked up and kissed his blue lips. With weak resistance, Bucciarati's face was pulled over to deepen the kiss.

As if drinking from the fountain of time, the heart began to beat again in the empty chest, shriveled lungs began to fill, and signs of life began to show.

The clock began to run backward"

There is such great interest in the JoJo series that people take the time to write their own stories. The wide range of characters in the JoJo series has too many potentials than it is in the original work, and there are het pairings of Buccitarati and Giorno. For instance, "Giorati" is the slash ship between Bruno Buccitarati and Giorno Giovanna from the JoJo fandom. Many users, mostly girls, have uploaded gay fanfictions of Giorati on Bilibili. The above screenshot is taken from the Bilibili.com platform, and the correspondent translation is on the right-hand side. Normally, Buccitarati would be the bottom one in fanfictions. "Previous studies documented that tops showed a masculine profile and bottoms showed a feminine profile in gendered personality traits" [17]. To further illustrate this point, the given extract provides a concrete example. "Bucciarati's face was pulled over to deepen the kiss": Bucciarati is clearly on the receptive side. It is assumed that the character's personality and physical appearance incur fans' hidden gender stereotypes, which are revealed through their work.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Based on the graphs and statics discussed formerly, the author assumes that most anime fans on Bilibili have a universal benchmark of gender expectations, and those generalized preconceptions of femininity and masculinity define what a person is. "A gender stereotype is therefore harmful when it limits the capacity of women and men to develop their personal attributes or professional skills and to make decisions about their lives and plans" [18].

Stereotypical classifications of professions and subjects have strong implications for females. They impair learning and prevent females from fulfilling their full potential. Stereotypes lower one's self-assessment and sense of competence, i.e., a person's self-concept [19]. They even have an impact on career choices [19].

"Despite the recent electoral success of female candidates in local, state, and national elections, we find that voters' gender stereotypes have potentially negative implications for women candidates, especially when running for national office. We test the political impact of stereotypes by examining the relative importance of typical "male" and "female" personality traits and areas of issue competence for "good" politicians and a hypothetical candidate at different types and levels of office. Overall, we find a preference for "male" characteristics at higher levels of office" [20]. Given that the effect of gender stereotypes results in low representation of women at senior management levels, the notions of femininity held by fans on Bilibili reveals serious gender stereotypes existing among young adults, who are key contributors to China's workforce. Given the fact that youth's fundamental preconception of gender roles could be easily influenced by merely masculine/feminine physical appearance and characteristics, it is concluded that they would fail to see through different people and thus reduces others' opportunities to succeed.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The author has presented the currently existing gender stereotypes amongst anime fans on the B site by announcing their traditional notions of masculinity and femininity. The paper identifies social stereotypes mainly through the analysis of a character in JoJo's Bizarre Adventure: Golden Wind. To be even more convincing, roles from other Japanese animations provided by the B site are also analyzed as additional supporting details. The result of this finding qualitatively agrees with the hypothesis: anime fans would categorize a character as feminine/masculine based on his/her traits, and thus, creates nicknames, fanfics, and fanart that contradict their sexes. Consequently, immutable gender stereotypes are imprinted in people's minds, causing unequal social status, or gender inequality. The study of Gen Zers' preconceptions reveals the underrating problem and draws the attention of people into this problem.

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