

GENDER EQUALITY ISSUES IN DISNEY'S MOVIE "MULAN (2020)"

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ABSTRACT

Gender equality is defined as a thought that men and women have equal rights as human beings and should be treated equally. This issue becomes interesting to discuss because not all women and girls around the world experience equal rights. Mulan (2020) is a movie that shows the problem of gender equality. This research aims to point out that Mulan (2020) is considered as a movie depicting issues against women and a main character's effort to fight for human rights and achieve gender equality by analyzing scenes and dialogues. The research used descriptive study with a qualitative approach as a method of research. The semiotics analysis of Charles Sanders Peirce and liberal feminism theory used as the ground of knowledge to support the research. The results found in this research indicate that gender equality in this movie is a part of culture that includes physical and verbal form. The amount of research data analyzed consists of 10 data in the form of pictures and dialogues. In addition, this movie is shown to achieve the same rights, especially for women who often lose their rights as a result of society's demands and norms.

Keywords: Movie, Semiotics Charles Sanders Peirce, Gender Equality, Chinese Culture

ABSTRAK

Kesetaraan gender didefinisikan sebagai sebuah pemikiran dimana pria dan wanita memiliki persamaan hak sebagai manusia dan harus diperlakukan secara setara. Isu ini menjadi penting untuk didiskusikan karena tidak semua wanita dan perempuan di seluruh dunia merasakan kesetaraan gender. Mulan (2020) adalah sebuah film yang menunjukkan adanya masalah pada kesetaraan gender. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menunjukkan bahwa film Mulan (2020) dianggap sebagai film yang menggambarkan isu terhadap perempuan dan upaya karakter utama untuk memperjuangkan hak asasi manusia dan mencapai kesetaraan gender dengan menganalisis adegan dan dialog. Penelitian ini menggunakan penelitian deskriptif dengan pendekatan kualitatif sebagai metodologi penelitian. Analisis semiotika Charles Sanders Peirce dan teori feminisme liberal digunakan sebagai dasar pengetahuan untuk mendukung penelitian. Hasil penelitian ini

menunjukkan bahwa kesetaraan gender dalam film ini merupakan bagian dari budaya yang meliputi bentuk fisik dan verbal. Jumlah data penelitian yang dianalisis terdiri dari 10 data dalam bentuk gambar dan dialog. Selain itu, film ini menunjukkan proses untuk mencapai hak yang sama, terutama bagi perempuan yang sering kehilangan haknya sebagai akibat dari tuntutan dan norma masyarakat.

Kata kunci: *Film, Semiotika Charles Sanders Peirce, Kesetaraan Gender, Budaya Cina*

A. INTRODUCTION

Movie is defined as a series of live pictures or videos made by a film director. Movies can be interpreted as a medium of communication in an audio-visual form that has the purpose of delivering messages to audiences through dialogue, scenes, and objects in the movies. Movie is not only used to entertain, but also to share ideas and concepts (Maharati, 2015). A film director may be making a movie with purposes such as to give a message or a thought to something. Thus, movies may therefore be used as a medium to convey messages and connect society with culture. There are many types of movies with cultural content, including the one which talks about gender equality. In keeping with our research topic, we have chosen a movie that raises the issue of gender equality, *Mulan (2020)*, which is a live-action movie produced by Walt Disney. In *Mulan (2020)*, the director is trying to represent women as being strong, tough, and equal to men, and even superior to men.

Gender equality is part of human rights and a strong foundation for the peaceful and sustainable well-being of the world. The concept of gender is built by society as a substitute word for gender or leads to the role of men and women. Therefore, often gender equality is associated with femininity and masculinity as opposed to sex which are focused on biological identities such as men and women. From the meaning of gender, there is often a misunderstanding in society about the concept of gender. Gender is often misunderstood as a medium of promotion of women. However, gender is not just about women, but there is a relationship between men and women, the roles of men and women, and the division of labor.

Gender issues are defined as issues that concern injustice that negatively affect both men and women, but more to the negative impact on women. This issue became a misconception in the community that caused women to be placed in difficult positions in the future. Women are not given the freedom to choose jobs and are only given limited jobs such as household or positions that look feminine. Gender equality means that men and women have equal power and

equal opportunities in all aspects of life such as finances, education, and self-development. The realization of gender equality is no discrimination between women and men because they have the opportunity to participate, control over development, benefit equally, and fairly from development.

The purpose of this research is to find more about the issues or stigma against women in Chinese culture and a main character's effort to fight for human rights, and achieve gender equality by analyzing several scenes and dialogues. This study also aims to find out that women also have the same opportunities as men and should be treated equally regardless of gender.

B. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. Charles Sanders Peirce Theory

Semiotics is based on logic, according to Charles Sanders Peirce's Theory of Semiotics, since logic studies people's reasoning, whereas Peirce believes that reasoning is done through signs. According to Peirce, these indicators enable us to think, relate to others, and make sense of what the environment presents. According to Peirce, a sign or representamen is anything that represents something else to someone in some way or capacity. Something else that Peirce referred to as the interpretant is known as the interpretant of the initial sign, which will lead to a certain item. There is a requisite for a representamen to become a sign, and that requirement is the existence of a ground. While the ground in this context refers to the information that exists in both the transmission and reception of the sign in order for the representation to be understood (Zaimar, 2008: 4).

Peirce divides the sign into three parts based on the object: icon, index, and symbol. An icon is a symbol that represents the real object's form. It can also be regarded as the link between comparable signs and things. That the icon's aim is to transmit a message in its original form. An index is a symbol that refers to things that are causal, or cause and effect. In this scenario, the sign is causally related to the object. The direct sense of the outcome of a communication. A symbol is a sign that is connected to both the signifier and the sign. That anything is represented by a sign agreed upon by the signifiers as a common reference.

2. Feminism Theory

This theory is consistently critical of lots of social orders like social change, power, social inequality, political institutions, education, and the family, and some others. Feminist theory is founded on four key questions: how women live (fate), why women are in their current predicament (experience inequality), how to

reform an unequal social reality, and how women differ based on their life, position, or status, and social lives of each other.

a. Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism adherents believe that lack of women in society happens as a result of an unequal (sexist) division of work and a strong patriarchal culture. As a result, liberal feminists feel that gender equality will be readily attained if the division of labor is transformed beginning with the home, education, work environment, media, and other sectors of life.

C. RESEARCH METHOD


The method used in this research is a qualitative descriptive method. Descriptive qualitative research is a scientific process that is frequently used and applied among a community of social sciences researchers, including those interested in science education. In descriptive qualitative analysis, a variety of explanations were also presented to analyze the data in order to get clear findings. The analysis relies on the existence of phenomena and data that is analyzed using explanation rather than numbers. (Chih-Pei, 2017).

The object of this research is a movie entitled *Mulan (2020)*, an action-drama movie directed by Niki Caro and produced by Walt Disney Pictures in 2020. It is based on the Chinese folklore "The Ballad of Mulan," and is an adaptation of Disney's 1998 animated film version. In collecting data, the researcher classifies the dialogue, scene, or narration that is focused on the issues of gender equality. This research used the semiotics analysis of Charles Sanders Peirce as a method of research to examine signs and find meaning in *Mulan (2020)*. This approach is appropriate to use for analyzing the movie, because the movie shows the main female character-Mulan, struggling to get the same opportunities as men.

To analyze the data, the researcher uses several procedures. First, collects all of the data including visual and verbal data in *Mulan (2020)*, that comprises gender equality senses. Second, categorize the data into aspects containing icon, index, and symbol. Finally, the researcher discusses the data analysis in theoretical terms based on research findings and draws conclusions from the data analysis. The research data analyzed consists of 10 data in the form of pictures and dialogues from the movie.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Limitations in The Act of Expressions

Data Label	Visual	Aspects		
		Icon	Index	Symbol
A001		1	2	
	Verbal			
	<p>Hua Zhou: "Any man would be fortunate to marry either of our daughters. Including Mulan."</p> <p>Hua Li: "I ask you, what man will want to marry a girl who flits around rooftops, chasing chickens? (2) Xiu gives me no trouble. The matchmaker will find a good husband for her. It is Mulan I worry about. They'll call her a witch. It's time you talked to her."</p>			

Interpretation:

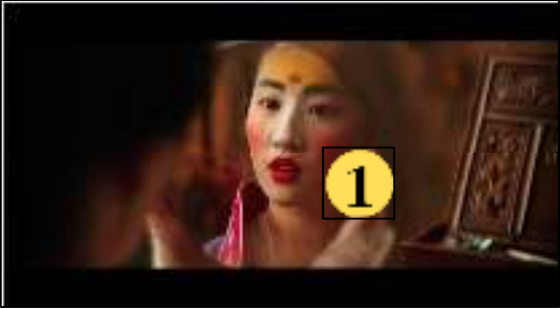
a. History

Mulan appears at the beginning of the scene, focusing her attention on herding a chicken into the coop. She ran past her neighbors' houses, destroying statues and dropping fruit shelves. She even climbed the tile to herd the chicken. It was unusual for them to see a woman acting like a man-hyperactive, at the time. People in Mulan's village still considered that if a woman does not behave elegantly, she will not be able to find a mate, a husband. It means they cannot bring honor to their family.

b. Recent:

The same thing goes the same in this modern era where gender stereotypes are still applied in society. Women are expected to behave elegantly in order to be accepted in society as 'real' women.

Table 2. Women and The Beauty Standard

Data Label	Visual	Aspects		
		Icon	Index	Symbol
A002		1	2	3
	Verbal			
	Matchmaker: "Quiet, composed, graceful, elegant, poised, polite. These are qualities we see in a good wife. (3) These are qualities we see in Mulan."(2)			

Interpretation:

a. History

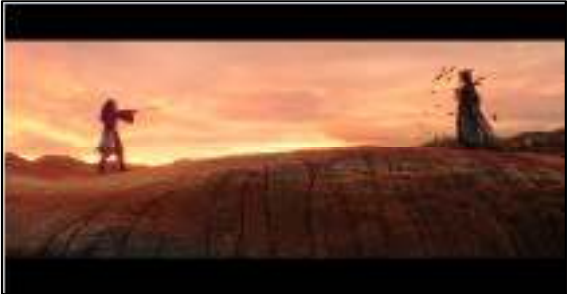
Seeing from beliefs in Mulan’s village, the condition of women who are controlled by a patriarchal system is deeply rooted in Chinese society at the time. Aside from the fact that women should bring honor to their families through marriage, society controls women by putting certain beauty standards that focus on appearance rather than other aspects. They also want women to have certain criteria in order to make them more attractive in the eyes of their husband. The scene shows that Mulan is expected to follow society standard of beauty by applying make-up to her face in order to make her skin look white as a porcelain doll, styling her hair properly, and wearing fancy clothing to elevate her beauty and slimness before meeting with a matchmaker who will find a husband for her.

b. Recent

Women with white complexions and slim bodies are portrayed as beautiful in almost all beauty product advertisements. As a result, these women are classified as attractive, and beautiful, as society expects. These have compelled women to meet the requirements of society.

Table 3. Social Judgment

Data	Visual	Aspects
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Label		Icon	Index	Symbol
A003		1	2	3
	Verbal			
	<p>Xianniang: "I understand. I was a girl like you when people turned on me. You don't think I longed for a noble path? I've lived a life of exile. No country, no village, no family. We are the same." (1)</p> <p>Mulan: "We're not."</p> <p>Xianniang: "We are. The more power I showed, the more I was crushed. (2) Just like you. You saved them today and still, they turned on you. (3) You are just at the beginning of your power. Merge your path with mine. We will be stronger together."</p>			

Interpretation:

a. History

In the conversation between Xianniang and Mulan, Xianniang says something very important. It was common in that era for every Chinese society to set a certain standard for women. The fact that only a man could wield a 'chi', and only a man could fight in the battlefield stated that every woman with 'chi' must be exiled and not considered a 'real' woman. In short, women have no place in society when it comes to things identical to men, no matter how hard they try.

b. Recent

Women are beginning to gain recognition in today's society for their abilities. They can have hobbies like men and even work alongside them.

Table 4. The Ability of Women

Data Label	Visual	Aspects		
		Icon	Index	Symbol
A004		1	2	3
	Verbal			
	<p>Bori Khan: "Why are you here?"</p> <p>Xianniang: "The attack has met a fierce resistance." (2)</p> <p>Bori Khan: "From who?"</p> <p>Xianniang: "A young woman from a small village."</p> <p>Bori Khan: "A girl?"</p> <p>Xianniang: "A woman. A warrior. A woman leads the army. And she's no scorned dog." (1)</p> <p>Bori Khan: "You led her here."</p> <p>Xianniang: [to Mulan] "Take your place, Mulan." (3)</p>			

Interpretation:

a. History

In Chinese society, it is impossible for women to beat men. But this scene shows that a woman with her ability can also beat a team consisting of men. Mulan's actions can prove that she is not only a courageous woman but also a hero who shows that women can also fight fiercely like men. With strong

determination and goals, in the end, Mulan breaks the stereotype that only men could fight. In fact, women can also be leaders, having a comparable place with men.

b. Recent

There are still many women who face discrimination when working with men in schools and workplaces today. They are frequently paid less than men. In some fields, they started to get recognition because of their intelligence. They are allowed to pursue hobbies that are identical to men. In fact, women are better off today, but they are still far from equal to men.

Table 5. Custom in Dressing

Data Label	Visual	Aspects		
		Icon	Index	Symbol
A005				1

Interpretation:

a. History

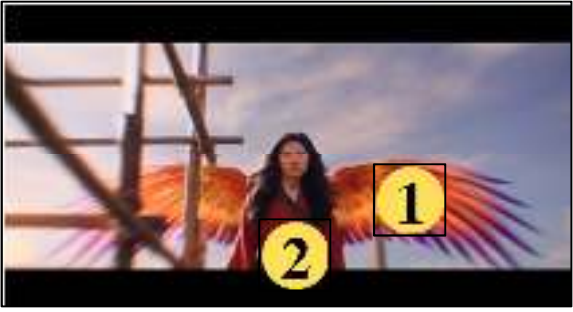
The pants in the dress code of Chinese society are included in men's clothing. While women wear skirts.

b. Recent

Both women and men can wear pants or skirts. There is no rule where women should wear skirts and men wear pants. Currently, women and men have the same obligation that brings honor to the family.

Table 6. Phoenix as The Representation of Gender Equality

Data Label	Visual	Aspects		
		Icon	Index	Symbol

Data Label	Visual	Aspects		
		Icon	Index	Symbol
A006		1		2

Interpretation:


a. History

The wings of the phoenix were wide and majestic as the meaning of strength and a means to fly higher. In addition, the wings of the phoenix are orange like the sun. The wide and beautiful wings of the phoenix meant that a new era had begun. That era was the end of Bori Khan and Mulan’s acceptance as a female soldier in that era. Phoenix wings symbolize kindness, duty, propriety, and reliability. Mulan and the wings mean that Mulan was a beautiful and strong woman at the same time.

b. Recent

Not only men can be strong, but women also can be strong.

Table 7. The Phoenix Emblem as A Sign Representation of Gender Equality

Data Label	Visual	Aspects		
		Icon	Index	Symbol
A007		1		

Interpretation:

a. History


In Chinese society, Fenghuang, the Chinese phoenix, is a combination of the words Feng and Huang which represent the male and female elements. Feng means male, Huang means female. Since the Yuan Dynasty (1271 – 1368), Fenghuang was regarded to be the symbol of the queen of China that symbolized kind and wisdom characters. Hence, it is then made into an ornament on objects chiefly associated with women, such as clothing, jewelry, and palace furnishings.

In this movie, phoenix is a representation of gender equality. With its meaning that includes the male and female elements, and the color of its feathers tend to reflect the female colors. The use of phoenix in this movie is to represent gender equality in which the phoenix scene always appears at the time Mulan is in trouble and leads her to equality and claim the women's rights. The phoenix emblem owned by Mulan's father is an *icon* because it is a replica of the phoenix used as an amulet that was always carried by Hua Zhou when he went to war. Although identified with women, objects that used phoenix ornaments continued to be used by both women and men because the phoenix was their ancestor.

b. Recent

Today, the phoenix is still regarded to be a creature that bears a sign of harmony, prosperity, and virtue by Chinese society. Objects decorated with phoenixes were commonly seen in the decorations at weddings and ceremonies. The phoenix ornament is usually used by the bride as a headdress. The use of the phoenix in objects is more generally used without seeing the gender identity or that only women may or will want to use phoenix ornaments in objects.

Table 8. Discriminations toward Women

Data Label	Visual	Aspects		
		Icon	Index	Symbol
A008				1
	Verbal			

Data Label	Visual	Aspects		
		Icon	Index	Symbol
	Hua Zhou: “There have been many tales of the great warrior, Mulan. But, ancestors, this one is mine. Here she is. A young shoot, all green...unaware of the blade. If you had such a daughter...her chi, the boundless energy of life itself...speaking through her every motion... could you tell her that only a son could wield chi? That a daughter would risk shame, dishonor, exile? Ancestors, I could not.” (1)			

Interpretation:

a. History

The dialogue spoken by Hua Zhou describes his anxiety about his daughter Mulan's very strong 'chi' power. Chi is a fundamental concept in Chinese culture that is regarded to be a part of every living being as a kind of ‘life power’ or ‘spiritual power’. In this movie, only men could wield this ‘chi’. Because in Chinese culture, if a daughter used it, she would risk shame, dishonor, and exile. The scene in which Hua Zhou watches Mulan while she practices martial arts moves shows that Hua Zhou fully supports Mulan, even though he is aware that there will be consequences that he must bear in the future.

Hua Zhou then appeared to smile at Mulan as she approached him, indicating that Hua Zhou was happy and proud of his daughter's abilities and that he didn't want to take things Mulan liked just because Mulan was a daughter. This scene represents gender equality in the sense that women should be able to gain access to, or get the same opportunities as men to hone their respective abilities, regardless of whether the ability is identical to a certain gender role, in this case Mulan's self-defense ability, which is identical to the ability usually possessed by men.

b. Recent

In this era, both men and women can learn martial arts moves. That is also a part of women's defense against unexpected crimes.

Table 9. Women Capability in Performing “Man’s Job”

Data Label	Visual	Aspects		
		Icon	Index	Symbol

A009				1, 2
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Interpretation:


a. History

During the Chinese dynasty at that time arrows were hunting tools and were weapons used during the war and only men were allowed to use arrows at that time. During the Chinese dynasty only men were allowed to join the war, therefore these war clothes could only be owned by men.

b. Recent

In today's era, archery is not only used as a hunting and fighting tool, but archery has also developed into a type of precision sport and this sport can be followed by anyone who wants to. Along with the times, now it is not only men who can join the military, there are also many women who have joined the military. Therefore, war clothes can now be owned by anyone who follows it.

Table 10. Judgment toward Women

Data Label	Visual	Aspects		
		Icon	Index	Symbol
A010			1, 2	
Verbal				

Data Label	Visual	Aspects		
		Icon	Index	Symbol
	Honghui: “Tell us, Hua Jun. What's your ideal woman?” Mulan: “My ideal woman is courageous.” Po: “ A courageous woman? ” (1) Mulan: “Yes. And she has a sense of humor. She’s also smart.” Po: “ Smart? ” (2) Cricket: “Well, what does she look like?” Mulan: “That’s not the point.”			

Interpretation:

a. History

A woman is required to be quiet, composed, elegant, graceful, and polite. Women are not required to be courageous and smart. At that time, a woman was required to be a graceful person and women were not allowed to get an education like men.

b. Recent

But in today's era, women can have a better life compared to the past. It's not a mistake as a woman is smart and has a higher degree than a man. Even today, not a few women who excel and make the nation proud. Women have the right to get opportunities and their rights as human beings to be able to play a role and take part in the public sphere.

E. CONCLUSION

Based on our analysis regarding gender equality issues and the issue against women in Mulan 2020 movie, the conclusion that can be drawn is that in Mulan, the researchers have found visual and verbal data bearing signs of gender equality. The data is drawn from several of the scenes and dialogues in the movie and analyzed using semiotics analysis in the perspective of Charles Sanders Peirce who emphasizes on bearing signs with icon, index, and symbols, and followed by analysis using liberal feminism that highlights the discriminatory actions against women.

The definition of gender equality in Mulan's movie is found in several scenes and dialogues where Mulan has the opportunity to do a job in public spaces, expressing opinions and delivering free speech that are consistent with her ability. Mulan's movie speaks of how a woman born with such physical strength as a man is especially blessed with *chi* and good martial arts skills. In the movie, Mulan is portrayed as a woman who is not frail and can perform roles commonly performed by men or considered to be man's job. However, Mulan's skills are not fully accepted by society because of norms or cultural traditions in Chinese society that govern women acting according to established norms.

Thus, gender equality issues in Mulan's movie are aimed at raising the issue that tends to undermine women's rights. At the end, Mulan finally succeeded in proving that a woman too can bring honor to their family by being herself.

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