

## REPRESENTATION OF GENDER IN *MULAN 2020* : A SEMIOTICS APPROACH

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### ABSTRACT

Movie is a work of art as a communication medium that can convey a message to many people. This paper contains some important information related to the understanding of Chinese culture towards Mulan as a strong woman through a movie called *Mulan*, the 2020 version directed by Niki Caro. This study aims at analyzing, interpreting and representing the gender of the main character in the movie, namely Mulan, through a semiotic approach guided by Pierce's theory. In addition, it has also been briefly explained the storyline of the movie, especially the focus on Mulan. The research method used by the researchers was a qualitative discourse analysis approach and was developed textually. This includes analyzing the discourse text contained in *Mulan*'s movie based on her character as feminine under gender code and then connecting it with social life, analyzing body language or cultures conveyed by each scene that can describe Mulan's character as a great woman. Then, the data source has been collected online, that is from the internet and this article is a non-participant. Based on the movie's story, there are 10 valid data that have been captured as evidence of social impact. The data was analyzed through the *Mulan* movie, which has a duration of 1 hour 55 minutes, with the themes of adventure, drama, action. Meanwhile, findings and discussion was focused on analyze the movies based of the characters, gender and based of semiotics approach with showing some evidences in the form of pictures of the scene that showed that the women gender in the *Mulan* movies. This article concluded that gender representation in the *Mulan* movie 2020 is a serious problem that occurs in the socio-cultural environment of society, so the use of the Semiotics approach helps in analyzing the gender context in the movie.

**Keywords :** *Discourse analysis, Gender equality, Mulan Movie 2020, Semiotic approach*

### I. INTRODUCTION

A movie is an audio-visual communication to convey or share a message to a group of people gathered in a certain place. It is the way for people to tell stories that have a purpose to entertain or educate people (Tseng, 2013). A movie talks about space and time and tells about life and can even influence an audience or give some positive messages and can impact people

to be better. So, the movie was taken with the title *Mulan* version 2020. Where the genre is action, adventure, and drama. Mulan as the main character is telling about a chinese woman who is going to war to replace her father. Mulan is different from a normal woman in her surroundings. Because since young, she has been gifted with a power as strong as a man's. Based on the movie, this study case

is more representative of gender understanding with a semiotic approach. Semiotics talks about signs of literature works or linguistics (Hossain & Fu, 2016). According to Peirce theory (Marcel Danesi, 2004; pp 36-38) gender is a kind of social code. Gender equality is the character of male and female (Liebler, Jiang, and Chen, 2015).

But this study was only talking about female gender. The movie showed that if a woman got judged for couldn't ever being powerful. However, the female

gender in *Mulan* if there's a woman who is strongest as a man it can be labelled as a 'witch'. The witch that is mentioned in the movie refers to some taboo things for people (Fay, Poppe, Rauch, 2016). That means women shouldn't do things that are connected with some man's business just like using a weapon or riding a horse, or becoming a soldier. This statement also concluded if Chinese women were being treated like a charm for increasing the population and just doing their duties as women. By this study, it could influence audiences what they got after seeing *Mulan* towards gender equality. Therefore, this study was made to provide an overview, note observation, and make the statement that women deserve to do what men do.

## **INTRODUCTION TO *MULAN MOVIE 2020***

The character *Mulan* in this movie becomes the oldest daughter of Hua Zhou who defies tradition and law, her way is to disguise herself as a man to replace her ailing father, Hua Zhou. This story begins because imperial China issued an announcement that one son from a family must serve in the Imperial Army to defend the country from the invading Huns.

However, in *Mulan's* family there is only her father as the only male, but *Mulan's* father's condition is very weak and makes it impossible to go to war. Therefore, *Mulan* finally decided to disguise herself as a man so that her father would not be forced to enter the battlefield. *Mulan* also brought armor from her father and then went to the army training ground. All members of the Army including Commander Tung, *Mulan's* mentor, no one realizes that *Mulan* is a woman.

## **GENDER CODE IN MOVIE**

Some movie makers often use women to unravel the myths of femininity to express gender issues through a movie and the conditions in which everyone can see and hear about gender issues (Jansson, 2016). Many women become main characters in a movie by providing female characters with aspirations outside of romance (Jane, 2015). Gender representation in the movie world is seen from a phenomenon that

often occurs in women. The study of gender equality in the movie industry is an important problem that is often faced by women (Jansson, 2016). In movies, this is often shown to address aspects of inequality that often occur in the real world.

### **SEMIOTIC APPROACH IN MOVIE**

The semiotic approach is a study that focuses on discussing how to understand or interpret symbols or signs in the process of conveying messages by communication media, namely movies (Davidsen, 2016). Social life is depicted in film shows. Thus the symbols implied in the movie can be transferred by the audience into their lives. Things that have symbolic meaning are not provided. In the movie setting, the main character has very important symbolic meaning, because characters are often used symbolically (Tseng, 2013). In every form of story, a symbol is something concrete (a special object, image, person, sound, event or place) that represents or symbolizes a complex idea, attitude, or feeling so as to produce a meaning greater than what is stored in itself. Therefore, a symbol is a kind of communication unit that has a special burden. Movie is a means of conveying messages that can be received quickly, besides that the content of the movie in general is not far from everyday life. In this case, so that the message of the

movie can be received by the audience comfortably, the story writer plays an important role, he must be able to create a storyline that can drift and dive into the contents of the story as expected by the writer and the audience. In the message conveyed by the writer of the story, meaning that can be learned will be generated so that it is useful for the audience (O'Leary, 2003). Because indirectly every activity carried out by humans in their daily lives has a meaning. In the study of science, meaning has its own chain which is symbolized by a sign. Meanwhile, the study of the sign itself is semiotics. So, in this study, researchers will analyze the symbols of Mulan's character in the Mulan 2020 film that presents women. The theory used by researchers is Pierce's Theory, which discusses the gender code of social life.

### **1. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The appearance and behavior of a character in a movie is a means of communicating gender norms and constructing possible readings of masculinity and femininity. There has been increasing documentation that gender representations in the media tend to be more dominant. However, literary works flourish with textual and semiotic analysis in a particular movie, relatively little quantitative work has explored patterns

that's all over the movie. Even less such analysis has been carried out on non-western movies, although the popularity and production of increased features in movies in places such as India, Japan, Korea, and more recently in China, largely analyzed messages. The characteristics include the depiction of gender characters, (Liebler, Jiang and Chen, 2015) as currently being analyzed. This analysis examines the gender construction of the main characters in the *Mulan* movie.

In this study, researchers discuss gender equality in a movie. Usually, female characters in a movie often have to be obedient compared to characters that are owned by men. According to (Luisi, 2018) analysis in media content found that a woman's character is often a submissive character compared to a male character representing a more active character. Women tend to be synonymous with domestic roles or positions that are marginalized because of a culture that is considered correct. This was also being said that female characters in movies are often not as complex as male characters in a movie, this results in a very weak position of women when compared to the roles that men have. Every individual should be given equal opportunities and equal rights, including the opportunities and rights of women. So not all opportunities must be fully grasped by

men.

The researcher tries to analyze and interpret the character of women who are different in general based on *Mulan's* movie perspective. What we know is that a woman is only gentle and graceful. However, the researchers found that the film to be analyzed will be inversely proportional because it depicts the lives of girls among the lives of men in the battlefield against the enemy. To see how the character of a woman who dares to break tradition or who can become a role model as a woman who is strong, independent and can save herself and others. It is often the case that the media belittles social outgroups by stereotyping them. According to (Luisi, 2018) the film has depicted the female character in stereotypical gender roles and subject to male characters. There are still many who think that women are weak creatures of God, but in fact a woman can also do a job that is usually done by a man, because women do not always have to be under men. Another purpose in this research is to strive or show how stereotypes of a film puts women in a lower position, exploited and objectified by men. Some women's behavior in the film is represented so that it is more suitable to be constructed normatively to be shown to everyone.

Semiotics has been an academic discipline for more than 100 years. Many scholars,

starting with Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles S. Peirce, have developed the concept of a sign that forms a different tradition or paradigm in the field of semiotics (Zhao, 2018). Zhao redefined the concept of "sign". He stated very clearly that the sign is a perception that contains meaning. Nothing in matter itself can carry meaning. For example, empty space in pictures, pauses in musical works, blank expressions on faces or even the lack of response can be filled with meaning in certain situations. Thus, the understanding of signs as "perceptions" makes its definition much more precise than the traditional understanding of signs. For Zhao, a sign must have a vehicle to carry its meaning, however this vehicle may not be physical, it may be the perception waiting for the interpreter to do an interpretation.

Zhao argues that "characteristics are ubiquitous in every culture, but the reasons are not morphological but pragmatic." A cultural tolerance, driven by the need to maintain a position. The stress stems from the claims of subcultures. In this way, complex interactions among the three several things determine the development of cultural trends. This original insight into the mechanisms of cultural development is inspiring, for it to deepen our understanding of global structures and cultural movements. Therefore, cultural

marking can also be applied to explain historical exchanges between cultures: cultures that result from asymmetries in the duality of cultural categories, may change with cultural development.

Therefore, cultural development is a history of sign change. The history of dress may be a good example to shed light on the dynamic role of traits in human culture. Historically, men are gender, it is a tagged term, and therefore men need to dress up. Women don't dress up for most of history, because they were middle terms, were influenced by positive things, so they didn't have the pressure to mark. However, in contemporary society, this is the case to be a reversed tagging model so that women are marked by middle and position in terms, then women should dress up.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design :**

This study was using a qualitative approach within identifying the use language through discourse analysis as the procedures dealing with the topic about the symbols of being woman by Mulan appears under gender equality in Mulan movie 2020 version. Discourse analysis as a method is to study a more qualitative approach about linguistics or to identify the typical language use related to social

context (Mullet, 2018). The study was focused on representing gender to the culture or social context where it was talking about how there is a phenomena people keep judging characters, personality and looks to underestimate women. The data would be analyzed with understanding of textual contexts for every scene that related to the topic.

### **Data Collection :**

The data was collected from a film with title "Mulan" that was released in 2020 which was conducted based on data online. This film, adapted by American from China, shocked women. The data was related to non participants. Because the source data taken by several captures or pictures from the scenes of the film already showed Mulan character under gender equality understanding as a proof that data is valid. There are 10 data that researchers already got dealing with Mulan characters. The data was obtained to find some textualls as discourse, looking for the information towards Mulan and how her gender influenced culture and also social life.

### **Data Analysis :**

Mulan 2020 was a film adaptation from American disney animation from 1998 with title Mulan. Mulan 2020 was for 115 minutes or about 1 hour 55 minutes. Mulan aired on march 25, 2020. The theme of this

film was about fantasy action or adventures produced by Walt Disney Pictures. By the data, it could be analyzed about Mulan's character, it turns out that there is still a culture that makes a woman not allowed to do things that are usually done by men. Of course this research would be analyzed with a viewpoint that could be seen based on each data that has been taken from several scenes in the film as a medium of information. In addition, the five data that have been collected would be discussed in response to the problems faced by the researchers. Through the delivery of language in the discourse regarding the character of women, this certainly has an impact on the results desired by the researchers. In other words, the researchers would describe the meaning of each discourse and then present the character of women in real life.

## **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **MULAN AS THE CHARACTERS**

As the characters in the movie, Mulan was being pictured as the woman who had free spirited characters. Her free spirited characters influencing her behaved just like a man. For example riding horses or using weapons that in society eyes were not appropriate things to do by a woman. The findings of her spirited characters were found in the minute 13:29. The free spirited characters of Mulan are also being



found out in her expression and emotions. The free spirited characters are always being pictured with expressions of smiles and happy emotions.

Beside having free spirited



characters Mulan also being pictured as the strong willed women characters who are brave entering the battlefield. The strong willed and brave characters of Mulan brought her to prove that women can also show her honour and loyalty to her country as same as men's soldiers do. The evidence of Mulan's strong willed and brave characters are found in the scene where the war begins. The scene showed Mulan riding her horse with fired up emotions being drawn clearly in the movies in minutes 1:05:31.

## MULAN AS THE GENDER

Mulan is the movie about a woman who disguised herself as a soldier replacing her father. The case of her action of replacing



her father for going to war while disguised herself as a man was making her against her gender and position as a woman. The



movie shows that women aren't allowed to touch or be closer to the things that are connected to man activities and must behave just like how the woman normally does. That is behaving quietly, gracefully, elegantly, politely and also has a good quality that can make them become a good wife in the future. The scenes are shown

with Mulan pouring the tea to each of the cups which symbolized some codes that women must have in themselves. The scenes were at 16:23.



Mulan is also a movie that also talks about women's value in society's eyes. The value of the women in society eyes in Mulan movies are how women are seen as the gender who must bring prosperity and honor in their family. bringing prosperity and honor means that as the women are born in their family, they must be ready for risking or hides their gifted talent just like in Mulan case where she must ready to hide her gift as the women who are being gifted with amount of strong's Chi's locked in herself so that way she could maintaining the honor of her family. Besides for the sake of maintaining the honor of her family.

The another reason why she must hide her gift is because as a woman she isn't allowed to have an amount of Chi's in

herself because Chi's existed for a man warrior not for women. The scene is being seen in the minutes 5:34 that showed the scene of young Mulan and her Father. and the talks aboutMulan must hide her gift for the sake of maintaining her position as the woman who was bringing thehonor for her family was being seen in the minutes 5:45 until 6:06.

### **MULAN AS THE SEMIOTIC APPROACH**

In the movies, there's some words called 'witch'. 'Witch' in the movies is represented as the symbol of women from



society to represent the woman who acts just like a man. The reason why 'witch' is being symbolized as the way for representing a woman who acts like a man is because 'witch' is being portrayed as the creature who is always making some problems everywhere they go. 'Witch' words are also being considered with the meaning to judging the women who didn't act just like a proper woman does. The



women who got the nickname as the 'witch' oftenly being looked down upon by society. The statements are being found in the scene of Mulan in minutes 3:03 where there is a scene of the people who are gathering around Mulan and look at her with hatred eyes and look down on her because her acts being considered as the things that actually not must be done by a woman. The expressions of dislike and hatred being thrown at Mulan are clearly being portrayed in the movies with representation of facial expressions they make in the movies. As the target of the hatred of people arounds her, Mulan shows a facial expression of sadness because she realizes that people around her didn't accept her being who reacted just like a man.

The talks about 'witch' also being portrayed in the movies where the scene

shows Mulan parents who are being worried with their daughter who maybe soon could be considered 'witch' by some people around them. Those scenes are being seen in the minutes 4:25 until 4:28. The reason why both of Mulan parents getting worried about Mulan being called 'witch' was because Mulan as the



woman must know her position as a woman that someday will become someone's wife.

Women who are ready to become someone's wife means that she is also ready to bring honor for her family. Because in the movies it is said that the value of the women as the gender are being seen when they were already married to someone and married to someone means that the women already bring honor for their family.

Mulan's gender as a woman also became the symbolism in the movies because her

character shows that women can also enter the battlefield or do the things that man



does. Mulan characters in the movies break the rule of women that should behave based on the women codes and also women value that just being seen as the form of some family honor. In the movies Mulan succeeds, proving that as the woman she also can show her loyalty to her kingdom and also bringing honor for her family without using women codes as the way to show her value as a woman. Mulan was successful in showing her identity because she was brave entering the battlefield as her gender, who is a woman. The scene of her bravery was being shown in the minutes 1:06:00 where in those scenes Mulan was entering the battlefield and knocking out so many soldiers from the enemy side.

Just like the meaning of red that means brave and also confidence, Mulan was fighting facing up to all of her enemy with bravery showing her acts as the true warriors who are holding strong the three promises of a warrior that is loyal, brave and true while confidently showing her

true self as a woman. The red clothes became the special identity to portray that Mulan was the type of strongest and braver woman in the movies.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study concluded how to interpret the gender that is in the main character in the Mulan 2020 movie. To interpret this, the semiotics approach is used to analyze the text in the Mulan movie by presenting gender roles in the socio-cultural environment. Gender is questioned because socially it has resulted in differences in the roles, responsibilities, rights and functions as well as space for men's and women's activities in society. There is a negative attitude of society towards women which makes the position of women always in the disadvantaged party. This usually becomes a guideline or norm that is not directly applied by some people. Women are always seen as weak and have the responsibility to take care of housework, but in the Mulan movie this can be broken because a woman is also able to do work like a man can do.

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