

CHALLENGING PATRIARCHY: LIBERAL FEMINISM IN *MULAN* (2020)

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Abstract

This study examines gender equality through the lens of liberal feminism in the film *Mulan* (2020), addressing a significant research gap in existing feminist analyses of the film. While previous studies have examined Mulan's character from various perspectives, this research focuses specifically on how her character development and actions reflect liberal feminist principles, offering a fresh perspective on her challenge to patriarchal norms. Data was collected and analyzed using qualitative textual analysis, which involves a close examination of key dialogues, character interactions, and narrative choices within the film. This method allows for a deeper understanding of how Mulan's journey embodies the ideals of liberal feminism, particularly in its defiance of traditional gender roles and its advocacy of individual agency. This study argues that the character of Mulan represents a meaningful redefinition of female agency through liberal feminist ideals. By portraying a strong female protagonist who challenges societal expectations, the film reinforces feminist discourse and highlights the evolving representation of female empowerment in contemporary cinema.

Keywords: *Feminism; Gender Equality; Liberal Feminism; Patriarchal Norms.*

1. Introduction

A movie script serves as a medium for conveying ideas and concepts, blending factual elements through narrative structure, dialogue, shot descriptions, and set design (Suprpto, 2022). This distinctive literary form combines storytelling with visual and auditory elements, creating a blueprint for the cinematic experience. Among the many scripts available, Elizabeth Rudnick's adaptation of *Mulan* (2020) stands out as a significant subject for feminist analysis. It presents a modern retelling of an ancient story, resonating with current discussions on gender equality and women's empowerment.

Originally released as a Disney animated film in 1998, *Mulan* is based on the ancient Chinese folk tale "The Ballad of Mulan" (Qingli & Ying, 2020). The story follows *Hua Mulan*, a young woman who disguises herself as a man to take her father's place in the imperial army. Her mission to protect her dynasty and honor her family showcases bravery and filial duty while delving into complex themes of gender identity and societal expectations (Liu, 2021). Mulan's journey highlights feminist themes as her

actions challenge societal norms that restrict women to traditional roles, such as domestic duties and exclusion from public life (Wang, 2020).

While earlier studies (e.g., Smith & Johnson, 2021) have explored feminist themes in *Mulan*, few have specifically examined its connection to liberal feminist theory. This study addresses that gap by focusing on how *Mulan*'s defiance of patriarchal norms exemplifies liberal feminist principles. The central research question guiding this analysis is: How does *Mulan* (2020) depict gender equality through the lens of liberal feminism?

The 2020 live-action adaptation, written by Elizabeth Rudnick, reinterprets this story for a contemporary audience, adding depth to *Mulan*'s character while further exploring the feminist themes present in the original tale. This version emphasizes the protagonist's resistance to rigid gender norms imposed by a patriarchal society. The film portrays *Mulan* as a symbol of defiance against gender-based oppression, reflecting broader feminist discussions aimed at dismantling such constraints (Smith & Johnson, 2021). By showcasing *Mulan*'s journey of self-discovery and empowerment, the script serves as a critical reflection on the significance of gender equality in both historical and modern contexts (Doe, 2019).

Liberal feminism, which is rooted in Enlightenment ideals of individual rights and rationality, advocates for equality between men and women through legal and political reforms. It argues that women's subordination is not due to biological differences but rather stems from unequal access to rights and opportunities (Freedman, 2014). The script critiques gender discrimination by illustrating how *Mulan* must conceal her identity as a woman to fit into the male-dominated military. By the film's conclusion, *Mulan* is recognized for her abilities and accepted for who she truly is, symbolizing the victory of liberal feminist ideals over patriarchal structures.

Mulan's character not only demonstrates physical strength and courage but also grapples with internal conflicts and a determination to challenge societal gender roles. Through her journey, the script examines broader issues of gender inequality and highlights the importance of individual agency in the fight for social justice (Hansen, 2021). The film ultimately serves as a metaphor for the feminist struggle, with *Mulan*'s journey representing the quest for gender equality and the empowerment of women in all areas of life.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Protagonist

The protagonist is the character who the reader or audience follows most closely and who faces opposition from an adversary. This adversary, often referred to as the antagonist, presents challenges, conflicts, and obstacles that test the protagonist, revealing both their virtues and flaws. A protagonist can take on various roles, such as a supporting protagonist, tragic hero, antihero, hero/heroine, or even a villain, depending on the narrative structure. The key attribute of a protagonist is their significant dramatic objective, which drives the plot forward.

According to Morner and Rausch (1991: 31) in Hanggur et al. (2022), the protagonist in a film is typically the character portrayed as having a morally positive disposition. This character's behavior, moral compass, mental state, and physical actions are pivotal in identifying them as the protagonist. In discussing the protagonist, it's essential to also consider the other characters, as their interactions with the protagonist

are crucial to the narrative. The way these characters behave is consistent with their roles within the story, often serving to highlight the protagonist's journey.

2.2 Movie Script

A movie script, also known as a screenplay, shares structural similarities with drama, incorporating essential elements such as setting, plot, characterization, and theme. However, the approach to writing a movie script differs significantly from that of a drama, particularly in its reliance on dialogue to convey characters' traits, emotions, and motivations. This focus on dialogue is instrumental in translating the written narrative into visual scenes, ensuring that the story is effectively communicated through the medium of film (Field, 2005).

A movie script serves as a comprehensive blueprint that outlines the key directions and components necessary to bring a film to life. It provides the foundation for the entire filmmaking process, guiding the transformation of a story concept into visual sequences, dialogues, and other narrative elements (McKee, 1997). The script is not only a guide for directors, actors, and cinematographers but also a tool that shapes the pacing, tone, and overall aesthetic of the film.

2.3 Gender Equality

Gender equality refers to equality between men and women, boys and the law, in terms of decision-making and income. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees every right and freedom regardless of gender. Gender equality is the socially constructed difference between men and women, which is the difference in expected behavior for both sexes (Horký and O'Sullivan 2010).

Gender equality refers to the state in which individuals, regardless of their gender, have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities. It encompasses equal access to resources and opportunities in areas such as education, employment, political participation, and healthcare. Achieving gender equality is integral to fostering peace, enhancing human potential, and promoting sustainable development (United Nations, n.d.). Over the decades, significant progress has been made globally through various feminist movements and governmental policies aimed at addressing gender disparities. Despite these efforts, many regions continue to experience gender inequality, especially in the workplace, politics, and access to education (World Economic Forum, 2022).

2.3.1 Gender Equality in Literature and Cultural Narratives

The role of literature in shaping and reflecting societal gender roles has been widely acknowledged. Gender representations in literary works often mirror the social and cultural values of the time in which they were written. Historically, literature has featured predominantly male protagonists, reinforcing traditional gender norms and hierarchies. According to a recent study by the World Economic Forum (2022), male characters outnumber female characters by a ratio of 4:1 in traditional literary works, a reflection of the dominant patriarchal structure in society.

However, literature also serves as a platform for challenging these established norms. Feminist literature, in particular, critiques and subverts traditional gender roles, offering alternative narratives that empower women and celebrate their autonomy. Feminist writers such as Virginia Woolf, Toni Morrison, and Audre Lorde have used literature to address issues of gender inequality and challenge the patriarchy by portraying strong, independent female characters and narratives that empower women (Morrison, 1987; Woolf, 1929). This genre of literature plays an essential role in

advancing gender equality by offering new perspectives on women's roles and experiences.

Furthermore, literature and films, including Disney's *Mulan* (2020), continue to challenge conventional gender roles. In *Mulan*, the protagonist defies societal expectations by embracing traditionally male roles, such as that of a soldier. This narrative challenges the gendered norms within Chinese society and offers a more inclusive representation of women's strength and capabilities (Liu, 2020). Films like *Mulan* contribute to the broader discourse on gender equality, portraying women as capable of transcending the limitations imposed by patriarchal structures.

2.3.2 Gender Equality and Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism, a major school of feminist thought, emphasizes gender equality through legal and political reforms. It focuses on the protection of individual rights, advocating for equal opportunities for men and women in all spheres of life, including politics, education, and the workplace. Liberal feminists argue that gender inequality arises from systemic barriers that prevent women from accessing the same rights and opportunities afforded to men. Therefore, achieving gender equality involves dismantling these barriers through legal reforms and social change (Tong, 2009).

In literature and media, liberal feminism is often reflected in narratives that foreground women's autonomy, individual rights, and ability to challenge restrictive societal norms. By examining works such as *Mulan*, one can analyze how female protagonists exercise their autonomy and challenge patriarchal structures in pursuit of equality. These narratives promote the notion that women should not be confined to traditional roles but instead be allowed to explore their full potential, free from societal restrictions.

Liberal feminism has been particularly influential in contemporary feminist discourse, influencing both the academic field and popular culture. It advocates for change through existing legal frameworks, believing that gender equality can be achieved by ensuring that all individuals, regardless of gender, have equal access to opportunities and protections.

2.3.3 Contemporary Perspectives on Gender Equality

In the present day, achieving gender equality continues to be a crucial global issue. According to the United Nations (n.d.), achieving gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also a necessary condition for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. Gender equality remains a priority on the global agenda, with initiatives such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 5, which aims to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" by 2030. This highlights the importance of continuing efforts to address gender-based violence, improve women's access to education and healthcare, and ensure women's equal participation in decision-making processes (United Nations, n.d.).

Additionally, the #MeToo movement and other contemporary feminist initiatives have garnered widespread attention, highlighting ongoing gender inequality in various sectors, including entertainment, business, and politics. These movements aim to raise awareness and challenge the status quo, demanding accountability for gender-based violence and discrimination (FutureLearn, n.d.).

2.4 Feminism in Literature

Feminism in literature has emerged as a vital field of study, analyzing the representation of women and the implications of gender dynamics in literary texts. This body of work challenges the historical marginalization of female voices and perspectives, asserting that literature reflects and shapes societal attitudes toward gender. Feminist literary criticism interrogates not only how female characters are portrayed but also how these portrayals influence readers' perceptions and societal norms regarding gender roles.

According to Showalter (1977), feminist literary criticism aims to reveal how literature perpetuates or challenges patriarchal ideologies, thus playing a significant role in advocating for gender equality. This critical approach seeks to expose the ways in which women have been historically portrayed in literature as passive, submissive, or secondary to male characters. Showalter's framework includes three phases of women's writing: the "feminine" phase, where female writers imitate male styles; the "feminist" phase, where women write in protest against the male-dominated literary canon; and the "female" phase, where women create literature that reflects their unique experiences and perspectives (Showalter, 1977). This evolution underscores the importance of acknowledging diverse female voices and experiences in literature.

Scholars like Gilbert and Gubar (1979) emphasize the need to examine the cultural and social contexts that inform literary depictions of women, illustrating how feminist critiques can unveil the power structures at play within narratives. Their seminal work, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, explores the representation of women in 19th-century literature, revealing how societal expectations and constraints have shaped female characters. They argue that literature often reflects the anxieties of patriarchal society regarding female independence and sexuality, suggesting that women's creativity has historically been stifled by these pressures. This analysis not only highlights the complexities of female identity but also calls for a reevaluation of how literary texts can serve as both mirrors and critiques of societal norms.

Feminist literature has also evolved to include contemporary issues, such as the representation of women in popular media and genre fiction. Scholars like Smelik (2018) argue that modern adaptations of classic texts offer new opportunities for feminist readings by challenging traditional narratives and stereotypes. For instance, adaptations of stories like *Mulan* or *Little Women* often reinterpret female protagonists, emphasizing their agency and resilience in the face of societal constraints. Such adaptations not only reflect changing attitudes towards gender but also contribute to ongoing discussions about women's rights and empowerment in contemporary society. Scholars such as Hansen (2021) and Smith & Johnson (2021) have analyzed the feminist themes in *Mulan*, highlighting how the protagonist challenges gender stereotypes. However, these studies have not fully explored how the film aligns with liberal feminism. This research builds on previous work by applying liberal feminist theory to analyze *Mulan*'s defiance of patriarchal norms.

In summary, feminism in literature is a dynamic and essential field that critically examines the representation of women and the implications of gender dynamics in literary texts. By revealing the historical marginalization of female voices and perspectives, feminist literary criticism serves as a powerful tool for advocating for gender equality and reshaping societal attitudes toward women. Through the works of scholars such as Showalter, Gilbert, Gubar, Crenshaw, and others, this field continues to

evolve, incorporating diverse voices and experiences that enrich our understanding of gender in literature.

2.4.1 Kinds of Feminism

Within feminist literary criticism, various kinds of feminism address distinct issues and perspectives, enriching the discourse surrounding gender representation in literature. According to Jaggar (1983), feminism can be categorized into several kinds, each with its own approach to addressing women's oppression and advocating for gender equality:

2.4.1.1 Liberal Feminism

Rooted in 17th and 18th-century liberal political philosophy, liberal feminism emphasizes equality between men and women, advocating for equal rights and opportunities. It draws heavily on Enlightenment ideals that champion individual freedom, rationality, and the belief that all individuals, regardless of gender, are entitled to the same rights (Tong, 2009). Herouach (2019) argues that liberal feminism maintains that societal structures should be reformed to be more inclusive of women's individual rights, focusing on dismantling legal and institutional barriers that hinder women's full participation in society. Unlike more radical forms of feminism, liberal feminism does not necessarily challenge the underlying systems that perpetuate gender inequality; instead, it seeks to work within those systems to create equitable opportunities.

The liberal feminist perspective holds that gender equality can be achieved through reforms within existing social and political frameworks. This approach emphasizes core principles such as equality, individual rights, legal reform, and autonomy (Tong, 2009; Herouach, 2019). Liberal feminists advocate for policies that promote equal access to education, employment, and political representation. They argue that by ensuring women have the same legal rights as men, including reproductive rights, property rights, and protection against discrimination, society can progress toward true equality (Duffy & Nentwig, 2019).

2.4.1.2 Marxist Feminism:

Marxist feminism, which first appeared in the 1970s, connects capitalism and class conflict to the subjugation of women. It contends that capitalism is the main cause of women's oppression and criticizes orthodox Marxism for ignoring gender concerns. It then calls for the establishment of a socialist regime that would remove gender inequality. Marxist feminists have noted that, for social, commercial, and economic reasons, women's oppression is evident in the home, workplace, and social spheres Dil et al. (2019).

2.4.1.3 Socialist Feminism

According to Bell et al. (2020), socialist feminism seeks to understand the relationship between gender and class by examining the results of a just distribution of incentives. It emphasizes the intersectionality of gender, class, race, and other social categories, advocating for systemic change to achieve gender equality. Social feminists have observed that women's experiences with gender are influenced by class disparities. For example, wealthy women may hire less fortunate women to help them with household chores.

2.4.1.4 Radical Feminism

Radical feminism emerged in the 1960s, focusing on patriarchy and male violence as the root causes of women's oppression Jensen (2021). It seeks to dismantle patriarchal systems and challenges the traditional roles of women in society, advocating for a complete transformation of social structures.

2.4.1.5 Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism links the exploitation of women with the exploitation of the environment, emphasizing the need for harmony between humans and nature. It critiques patriarchal systems for their role in both environmental degradation and the oppression of women, advocating for a sustainable and equitable relationship with the Earth. According to Braidotti et al. (1994), ecofeminism is "the feminist position most explicitly concerned with environmental degradation." Its essence is far more spiritual than political or intellectual. There are two main components to it: feminine and ecology. It holds that under patriarchy, women are aware of and naturally appreciate nature, and they reject acts of violence against it and the subjugation of women Zhang (2021).

2.4.1.6 Cultural Feminism

Cultural feminism seeks to revalue and promote traits traditionally associated with women, such as cooperation, relationships, and care. It challenges patriarchal societies that devalue these traits and advocates for creating spaces that celebrate and empower women. The establishment and maintenance of distinct spaces focused on women that "promote female biology as the basis of women's power" is how cultural feminists fight the oppression of women. They search for ways to lessen the harshest effects of patriarchy Hyde (2022).

2.4.1.7 Black Feminism

Black feminism emerged in the 1970s as a response to the unique experiences of black women facing both racial and gender oppression. It emphasizes the intersectionality of race and gender and advocates for social justice for women of color Collins (2008).

2.4.1.8 Postmodern Feminism

Even though we live in a postmodern society in the twenty-first century, prejudice and discriminatory attitudes against women have not changed all that much over time Jensen (2021). Postmodern feminism, also referred to as third-wave feminism, embraces diversity and the multiplicity of women's experiences while criticizing the essentialist tenets of previous feminist groups. It questions established ideas about gender and promotes a more flexible and inclusive definition of identity.

These various schools of feminism offer different perspectives on the causes of women's oppression and propose different strategies for achieving gender equality. Collectively, they contribute to a broader understanding of the role of feminism in literature and society. In this study, the researcher uses the theory of liberal feminism approach.

John Stuart Mill was a liberal feminist who wrote 'The Subjection of Women' in 1869, a critical essay defending women's civil and human rights. Mill talks about three main elements of women's lives that he believes hold them back: society and the

construction of gender, education, and marriage. He argued that the oppression of women was one of the few relics of antiquity, a set of prejudices that greatly hindered the progress of mankind Stuart (1869). Mill stated, 'No one who knows anything about human history can dispute that all men are stronger and cleverer than all women. All women should try to do something even though the average woman cannot do something that the average man can do' Stuart (1970). Feminist liberals believe a just society is key to autonomous individuals. Therefore, equality and justice for women are necessary to support this. One of the common goals of liberal feminism is to create a just and caring society in which freedom can flourish. Both men and women can only flourish in such a society.

Mill states that even if all women are worse than all men at a particular thing, the prohibition against women trying to do that thing cannot be justified because any prohibition against what women naturally cannot do is excessive. Although women are great, they are not as strong as the men they compete with. In the movie in this study, the main character rebels against the prohibition for women to do activities commonly done by men, which supports this theory.

According to liberal feminism theory, women and men are not that different from one another because of biological distinctions; rather, their shared humanity outweighs their procreative differentiation. Men and women shouldn't be treated differently by the law if they are not different. Women ought to enjoy equal rights to education and employment possibilities as males. Lewis (2018) in Purwarno et al., (2021) states that liberal feminism is a philosophy and group that prioritizes equality in politics, the workplace, and the education system. In studying private sector issues, liberal feminism usually considers equality: how can one's private life promote or hinder public equality? As a result, liberal feminists also prefer men to be involved in marriage and childcare as equal partners. She goes on to say that the main goals of liberal feminism are gender equality in the public sphere, equal access to schools, equal pay, the elimination of sex discrimination in the workplace, and improved working conditions. These goals are largely achieved through legislative change. Due to the fact that they affect or hinder equality in the public sector, issues that arise in the private sector are of particular importance.

3. Research Method

Research design is a critical component that bridges the gap between conceptual research problems and empirical research questions. As noted by Asenahabi (2019), research design serves as the blueprint that guides researchers in structuring their inquiry to effectively address specific research questions. It involves a systematic, step-by-step procedure that researchers follow to achieve their research objectives before initiating data collection and analysis. According to Kerlinger (1986), research design is defined as the plan, structure, and strategy of a study, formulated to provide answers to research questions while optimizing control over variables to minimize potential biases.

In this study, a descriptive qualitative research approach was employed to analyze gender equality through the lens of liberal feminism as it pertains to the main character in the *Mulan* movie script. As Waruwu et al. (2023) explain, qualitative research seeks to understand the significance of various phenomena, symptoms, and social contexts by employing descriptive methods. This approach is ideal for examining the feminist themes in the *Mulan* script, as it allows for a nuanced exploration of the protagonist's character through her thoughts, dialogues, and actions.

Data for this study was collected through a close reading of the Mulan (2020) screenplay, focusing on key dialogues that reflect feminist resistance and gender expectations. According to Creswell (2018), the four basic types of qualitative data collection methods are observation, interviews, document analysis, and digital or audiovisual material analysis. In this research, document analysis was chosen for its ability to provide direct access to the language and words used in the screenplay, allowing for a detailed examination of the text.

The data collection process involved several meticulous steps to ensure alignment with the research objectives: (1) The movie script was read multiple times to ensure a thorough understanding. (2) Relevant parts of the dialogue, monologue, prologue, and key terms were identified and extracted, focusing on those pertinent to the research questions through the application of liberal feminist principles. This framework was used to analyze Mulan's challenges, particularly in scenes where she asserts her autonomy and rejects patriarchal constraints. (3) The data was then organized to align with the formulation of the research problem. (4) Finally, all relevant data was compiled for further analysis. This rigorous data collection process ensures that the research findings are based on a comprehensive and accurate representation of the Mulan movie script.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasize the importance of approaching data analysis as a series of sequential steps, starting with detailed examination and progressing to broader interpretations. The data analysis process for this study involved analyzing the feminist themes in the protagonist's thoughts, dialogue, and actions, with particular attention to specific sentences in the screenplay. The findings were evaluated to draw meaningful conclusions about the portrayal of feminism in the Mulan movie script. To enhance the validity of the study, bias was minimized by maintaining a consistent focus on the liberal feminist framework throughout the analysis, ensuring that interpretations remained grounded in the text. This structured approach to data analysis allows for a deep and thorough understanding of the feminist aspects of the script, providing a solid foundation for the study's conclusions. The source of this research comes from the movie script of Mulan 2020 (Rudnick, 2020).

4. Discussion

This chapter analyzes the challenges faced by the protagonist in Elizabeth Rudnick's *Mulan* (2020) to achieve the research objectives. The analysis focuses on the principles of liberal feminism embodied by the protagonist in the film. Furthermore, this study examines how the protagonist evolves as a character who challenges societal norms by adhering to the principles of liberal feminism. Mulan's rejection of traditional gender roles aligns with liberal feminism's emphasis on individual autonomy. Unlike earlier versions, this adaptation explicitly frames her defiance as a struggle for gender equality, reinforcing the importance of self-determination in feminist discourse

4.1 The Protagonist's Principles of Liberal Feminism

Gender equality can be addressed in two ways by liberal theory. First, it grants women the right to participate and own property by prohibiting legal discrimination. Second, liberalism incorporates its ideals into the private sphere to protect women from unique oppression (Gerson, 2002).

Chi, the naturally-aspirated life energy of every human being, can only be used by warriors (males). If a girl uses her chi, they will be considered a witch and ostracized

by society. The protagonist has chi, which only boys have because it is the form of his every move, so a girl faces the risk of shame, disgrace, and alienation. quoted as follows:

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? (Rudnick, 2020: 1)

The quote above shows that Mulan is opposed to having “chi” because of the belief that chi can only be used by men who symbolize energy and strength. Mulan acts as a protagonist who reflects the principles of liberal feminism by believing that women have the same rights and capacity to utilize this energy. In addition, the risk of “shame, dishonor, and alienation” mentioned in the quote above, suggests that society expects women to take on traditional roles. However, Mulan chooses her own path in life and refuses to let these expectations stand in her way. This shows the basis of liberal feminism which emphasizes everyone's right to choose their own path in life despite being opposed by society which can be seen from the following:

Your chi is strong, Mulan.
But chi is for warriors...
Not daughters.
(Rudnick, 2020: 2)

The quote above highlights that “chi” is reserved for “warriors” and not “daughters,” implying that women are deemed unworthy of wielding such power. As the protagonist, Mulan uses her full potential to defy this belief. Liberal feminism advocates for gender equality by challenging societal norms that confine women to traditional roles, as illustrated in the previous quote. This idea is further emphasized by the following quote:

I will bring honor to us all. I'm truly blessed to be in the presence of such enchanting women. I have no doubt today will be a momentous day for the Hua... Never mind that. We must be on time. I'm starving
(Rudnick, 2020: 3)

In the quote above, Mulan shows that she has to fulfill her role in society because there are expectations that she has to fulfill, but she also tries to maintain her determination and desire to be herself, which reflects liberal feminism that emphasizes that women should have the right to vote and determine their own roles in a society that positions women as subordinates who do not have the freedom to express their opinions, as in the following quote:

When a wife serves her husband...
... she must be silent. She must be invisible.
(Rudnick, 2020: 5)

The quote above suggests that women in marriage are expected to be “silent” and “invisible” to men, denying them a voice. In such a context, women's empowerment becomes crucial. As the protagonist, Mulan seeks to empower herself by refusing to remain “invisible” or “silent.” She takes a bold step by disguising herself as a man and joining the army. Through her transformation into Hua Jun, Mulan demonstrates that

women can also be heroes and leaders. Despite her achievements, she faces injustice from those around her, who treat her differently compared to Hua Jun. This is further illustrated by the following quote:

You would believe Hua Jun.
Why do you not believe Hua Mulan?
She risked everything by revealing her true identity.
She's braver than any man here.
And she's the best warrior amongst us.
(Rudnick, 2020: 17)

In the previous quote, Mulan has “risked everything” by revealing her true identity to recognize that women have the same courage and strength as men. Women have the right to choose their own path, as shown by Mulan's initial decision to disguise herself as a man and fight on the battlefield. Mulan remains brave in revealing her true identity, no matter what the outcome. “She is braver than any man here” challenges gender stereotypes that assume that only men have courage and strength. This is reinforced by “And she is the best warrior among us”, which considers women's empowerment important because not only does Mulan fight for herself, but she can also prove their ability to contribute to activities that are dominated by men, which is then strengthened by the following quote:

You told me my journey was impossible.
Yet here I stand.
Proof that there is a place for people like us.
(Rudnick, 2020: 19)

In the quote above, Mulan receives rejection due to doubts about her ability, which is considered “impossible”. Instead, Mulan says that she is “proof” that there is a place for women like her who are able to show courage and determination to change the way her society sees women as inferior. As a representation of female empowerment, Mulan reflects the values of liberal feminism by not accepting barriers from society to achieve her goals. Mulan shows that women have an equal place in society by saying “a place for people like us”, hinting that society should change its perspective on an equal future but should also keep in mind the responsibility towards family which is supported in the following quote:

Your Majesty...
I'm deeply honored by this immeasurable invitation...
but with humble apologies...
I cannot accept it. I left home under cover of darkness...
and betrayed my family's trust.
I made choices I knew would risk their dishonor.
Since then...
I have pledged an oath...
to be loyal, brave, and true.
In order to fulfill this oath...
I must return home and make amends to my family.
(Rudnick, 2020: 20)

According to the quote above, Mulan firmly declined the invitation, saying “a great honor”, showing that she has the ability to make her own decisions, challenging the traditional view that women should be subservient. As the protagonist, Mulan demonstrates important principles of liberal feminism, namely recognizing that everyone has autonomy and has the obligation to make their own decisions, Mulan also emphasizes an attitude of integrity by saying “swear. Mulan emphasizes that she makes decisions not for her personal interest but also considers the impact on others, especially her family, therefore Mulan shows her commitment to the values of norms and ethics, this is reinforced by Mulan's phrase “I must return home and make amends to my family.”

4.2. The Protagonist's Development in Challenging Patriarchal Societal Norms

This section explores how Mulan, as the protagonist, evolves in her resistance to the patriarchal societal norms that limit women's roles and agency.

4.2.1 Protagonist's Patriarchal Norms in Society

The frequent allocation of orders, directions, and praise to male characters over female characters underscores the patriarchal dominance depicted in Mulan's society. This dynamic sets the stage for Mulan's journey to challenge these restrictive norms through her actions and choices. In patriarchal societies, women are usually unreliable, especially in public settings (Moghadam 1992). Women's work in patriarchal societies mainly centers on their roles as mothers and wives, raising children according to social standards, and providing emotional support to their husbands (Joseph S 1996). Based on Elizabeth Rudnick's 2020 *Mulan* movie script, women are judged based on their ability to marry and bring honor to their families, which means that Mulan must fulfill these societal requirements as a daughter, as mentioned below:

A daughter brings honor through marriage.
(Rudnick, 2020: 1)

The sentence above shows the custom of a patriarchal society that requires women to marry to maintain the good name of their family, which limits the value of women by getting married. Women are not given the freedom to choose their own path in life, so they have to be good wives to fulfill the traditional roles prescribed by society. The film's lead, Mulan, feels hindered by this custom, which will prevent her from realizing her dream of becoming a warrior. Bravely, Mulan develops into a character who defies the patriarchal norm by choosing to take on the unusual role of a woman and running away from home to replace her father on the battlefield. By doing this, Mulan defies patriarchal norms physically and socially as she becomes a cause of “dishonor” to her family according to traditional patriarchal views. Gender equality and individual freedom to choose what they want in their lives are principles emphasized by liberal feminism. Mulan can achieve gender equality by showing that she is brave and capable of protecting her family and their dynasty, not just being a wife. Mulan also has to develop her character to deal with the pressure of gender hierarchy, given her position as a daughter who has to accept the traditional roles expressed in the following quote:

You are the daughter!
Learn your place.
(Rudnick, 2020: 6)

The emphasis on the sentence “learn your place” above shows that the patriarchal norms that exist in this society not only limit women's freedom but also force women to accept gender inequality as they are not allowed to participate in activities that are more dominant or masculine. This quote puts Mulan under pressure not to do things that are considered brave or equal to men as it would be considered a violation of societal norms. When her father tells her that she is “a daughter” and she should “learn her place,” Mulan thrives on directly defying social norms. She believes she can do more than society's expectations of women. Mulan has to go against her father because her father believes that women are not fit to perform masculine tasks such as fighting, and Mulan refuses to accept her “place” and performs actions that go against the patriarchal norms of society that limit her simply because she is a daughter. However, this is what helps Mulan develop to achieve gender equality, because according to the patriarchal norms of society, women are expected to be submissive and prioritize the needs of their husbands, which is reinforced by the following quote:

When a wife serves her husband...
... she must be silent. She must be invisible.
(Rudnick, 2020: 5)

This statement depicts a situation in which women do not possess authority or a voice within their relationships. It relates to the preceding phrase “learn your places,” which suggests that Mulan should conform to the societal role designated for her as a woman, implying that women are appreciated solely for their service and support of their husbands rather than for their accomplishments. Mulan develops her character to contest this societal expectation by voicing her wish for freedom and asserting her identity in direct defiance of these norms, as she strives for acknowledgment of her talents and courage to prove that women can be viewed as strong.

4.2.2 Protagonist’s Initial Role in Society

In society, the expression “initial role” refers to the anticipated responsibilities, activities, and behaviors of an individual based on various factors such as age, gender, social status, and cultural norms. At the beginning of the movie *Mulan* (2020), Mulan is portrayed as a young girl who is constrained by the strict expectations of a male-dominated society. She is expected to fulfill her role as a woman and bring honor to her family through marriage, as emphasized by societal norms, which results in Mulan feeling trapped in a standard that mandates her role as a woman to uphold her family's honor through marriage, this is supported by the following quote:

A daughter brings honor through marriage
(Rudnick, 2020: 1)

In the Chinese culture that serves as the backdrop for the movie *Mulan*, women are expected to fulfill their traditional roles as mothers and wives. According to the quote above, a daughter should “bring good luck”, which means marrying a man of high social status and reputation. Mulan is expected to be an obedient woman who is ready to marry and live a life governed by others. Mulan faces many problems as she defies these norms. She has to face the internal conflict of not fitting into the role she is expected to play, and she also has to face the conflict from the society that values

women's luck by marrying and carrying out traditional roles, this is supported by the following quote:

Your job is to bring honor to the family.
(Rudnick, 2020: 2)

In a society dominated by patriarchy, Mulan's life choices are very limited, as her main goal is to get married. Mulan was growing up in an environment where family honor was very important, and she faced pressure to live up to the expectations of her society. Therefore, she must develop her character as the protagonist by understanding that maintaining her family's honor can be achieved by breaking free from these restrictions, taking the bold step of disguising herself and fighting in battle.

4.2.3 Protagonist's Catalysts for Change

A catalyst for change is someone who introduces new or transformative ideas and inspires others to embrace them. They play a crucial role in fostering an environment that facilitates change. Such individuals exhibit key qualities like courage and clarity, demonstrating their strength by daring to turn possibilities into reality when the moment calls for action. In addition, they are highly creative because they can patiently maintain the groundwork for change and make connections with the thoughts and feelings of others (Meta Karagianni, VP, and Research Director 2022). In her character development, Mulan demonstrates her courage to catalyze change by disguising herself as a soldier in the battlefield surrounded by a patriarchal society, as shown in the following quote:

She risked everything by revealing her true identity.
She's braver than any man here
(Rudnick, 2020: 17)

This brave act shows her attempt to overcome the customs that hinder gender expectations. Mulan risked her safety and the honor of her family. Her bravery shows that a brave person can initiate change. The previous phrase was expressed by Hua Mulan's friends who already knew that Hua Mulan's bravery was greater than that of men, thus changing their perspective on women. Mulan became a catalyst for change in an era of patriarchal society by participating in battles and daring to make decisions, as shown in the following quote:

- I believe Hua Mulan.
- I believe Hua Mulan.
- I believe Hua Mulan.
- I believe Hua Mulan.
(Rudnick, 2020: 17)

The quote above shows that Mulan has gained the trust of her friends on the battlefield. They see Mulan as a brave and capable warrior, not an imposter. They see Mulan as a warrior who should be respected for her bravery. Mulan becomes an inspiration to the community as they begin to realize that courage and ability can defeat patriarchal norms. By developing her character into a catalyst, Mulan is able to raise society's awareness of women's potential, which means they must be recognized and valued to allow women to fight for their gender equality rights, as shown in the following quote:

You have brought honor to us all
(Rudnick, 2020: 22)

The quote above describes Mulan's successful journey in proving herself as a warrior worthy of admiration. It shows that *Mulan* not only values herself, but also uplifts everyone around her, thus challenging patriarchal society's perception of women's capabilities. While disguised as a man, *Mulan* is initially perceived as an imposter; however, she bravely demonstrates her strength and courage, showing that women can earn the same honor as men. Through her bravery, *Mulan* gains acceptance and her abilities and courage as a woman are finally recognized.

5. Conclusion

This study contributes to feminist film analysis by demonstrating how *Mulan* (2020) embodies liberal feminist ideals through its protagonist's resistance to gender norms. Future research could explore how different feminist frameworks—such as intersectional feminism—offer alternative readings of Mulan's character."The conclusions are as follows: Firstly, the protagonist embodies the principles of liberal feminism by rejecting traditional societal expectations that confine women to subservient roles. Mulan's belief in her innate abilities, symbolized by her "chi," challenges the notion that women are inherently inferior or unworthy of participating in male-dominated spheres. Her courage and determination exemplify the core tenet of liberal feminism: the belief in equal opportunities for women to develop their potential. Secondly, Mulan's character evolves as she actively defies patriarchal norms that restrict women's roles to the domestic sphere. Her transformation into a skilled warrior and eventual recognition as a hero illustrate that gender equality is achievable when women are empowered to break through societal barriers. Her struggles emphasize the significance of perseverance and self-belief in overcoming gender-based discrimination. Thirdly, Mulan's actions serve as a catalyst for societal change, inspiring those around her to reevaluate traditional perceptions of women's roles and capabilities. By earning respect and recognition as a warrior, she redefines conventional notions of honor, paving the way for broader acceptance of women's contributions in both public and private domains.

Overall, *Mulan* exemplifies the ideals of liberal feminism by asserting her autonomy, challenging societal expectations, and demonstrating that women can be equally brave, capable, and honorable as men. Her story reinforces the importance of dismantling patriarchal systems and empowering women to realize their full potential.

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