

CHAPTER II

MULAN (2020) AND FEMINISM IN FILM

Before the release of the live-action version of 'Mulan', the original animated film was released in 1998 and was acclaimed for being the most progressive Disney Princess movie. Both the animated and live-action versions feature numerous different scenes and plots. Meanwhile, the original Mulan story significantly differs from both Disney adaptations. The earliest surviving printed version of the story, known as the *Ballad of Mulan*, appeared in a 12th-century anthology. This short poem is believed to have originated as a folk tale from the fourth or fifth century, based on references from that period.

2.1 FEMINISM IN FILM

The image of women in the film industry in the 1970s was a figure of someone who was oppressed, by playing roles that portrayed objects, victims, seducers, and worked in the domestic sphere (household, receptionist, or supported girls). In films, women are often portrayed as inferior or 'crybaby'. In such a climate, it is not easy to change myths and practices that already exist regarding the image of the female figure. American feminists consider film as depicting the wrong image of women.

Mulvey (1989) On his essay 'Visual and Other Pleasures' explains that society's subconscious patriarchal way, has shaped the formation of the film. The depiction of women in films was something that is shaped by patriarchal culture, which allows men to live out their fantasies and obsessions by giving a male impression to a still image of a woman. According to Mulvey, the image available in the film is presented in the figure of a hero. However, the hero figure is reserved for male audiences (Gamble, 2006:80). Women are objects of view. Women's bodies become eroticized. The separation between active/male and passive/female also shapes the film's narrative. It is the hero who controls the story, arranges events and erotic views, male interludes,

and not the master of the narrative. Feminists oppose this conventional cinematic pleasure to be destroyed, cleaned up and then form a new language, which is fair for women and men.

The media is one of the main tools in shaping the process of gender construction that occurs in society. The media is considered to have the power to influence people to learn to define themselves with others based on their respective gender (Dafna Lemish, *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*, First Edition, 2012:1). Media has characteristics with a wide range. In addition, the media can also be an effective tool for disseminating the concept of gender to society. Gender does not come from God's conditions or nature, but it is made by human or socially constructed. The practical and strategic interests of women must be considered by the mass media when they carry out their functions as media. The formation of an understanding of gender is at least able to change people's views in dealing with the existence of women and can dispel negative views that tend to be discriminatory and gender biased (Ashadi Siregar, 2002: 219).

In cultural studies, there is the term *femme fatale*, which is the portrayal of women as ambiguous characters in classic films and film noir, which are films featuring gloomy settings where everyone is rotten and unbelievable, and used to describe a number of films during and after the second world war. The genre of a film can determine who a film is made for. For example, films with a romance genre are often produced as films for women. Where romance is considered to have less intellectual influence than genres identified as male films, such as action films. Wollstonecraft criticizes the romance genre for conditioning women as recipients of patriarchal power by mastering the attractiveness that women cannot resist (Gamble, 2006:354).

Films are often viewed primarily as a form of entertainment rather than a tool for persuasion. However, it is evident that films possess substantial persuasive power. As a medium of mass communication, film plays a crucial role. In Indonesia, the evolution of film as a mass communication medium has seen significant fluctuations,

yet it remains effective in delivering impactful messages (Rivers & Peterson, 2008: 252).

2.2 DISNEY AND FEMINISM

Walt Disney Animation is the largest film industry company in the world. This company, which has been working in the entertainment sector since 1923, has successfully won various prestigious international awards. Apart from that, this film, which is light but full of moral messages, is very interesting and in demand by people of all ages. Well, one of Disney Animation's most successful creations is the story of its royal princesses, whose existence has survived to this day.

Disney Princess film production has the power to capture the attention of the audience and make an impact through interesting stories that are appropriate to the social conditions of the time. With woman as the main character, the process of making the story is influenced by society's view of the role of women in every era. Through this film, Disney is targeting that this film be watched by women, from children, adolescents, and even adults so that the message about depicting female characters "should" be conveyed indirectly. Disney Princess films can be divided into three types, namely the classic princesses, rebels, and contemporaries. There are differences in the attitude, body shape, and lifestyle of princesses in each era which reflect the role of women at that time.

Mulan was released when Disney entered the Rebels Era (1989-1998). At this time, times began to change. Women began to get equal freedom and education with men. So, starting in 1989 Disney started a new era with the name "Rebels Era". Rebels Era Means rebel or fight. So, at this time, Disney characters are described as having a high sense of freedom and curiosity. They are determined to pursue their own dreams without making men the main reason. The themes at this time are determination, adventure, courage, and love.

There are various reasons why Disney is a studio that has successfully implemented gender roles in every film, one of the ability is to sell products according to the film. This is a very crucial reason because the role of children after watching a film is increasingly dominating. It is the nature of a child to imitate what they watch. Since the beginning, Disney animation has done its best to capture the essence of people's world. Children from various circles grow up watching Disney movies and learn various morals of life through acting, memorizing fragments of sentences spoken by the main character to playing the main character. These values can be learned by children so they make Disney princesses as their role models. The main actors of the films shown by Disney animation are independent, brave and heroic people. And because of this, Disney animation has pushed the notion of equality between the genders and built the perception that self-definition occurs not because of how one was born, but by one's own actions (Garabedian 2014).

2.3 MULAN AND THESE 2 DIFFERENT VERSIONS

As is well known, Mulan has 2 different versions and was released in different years. These are also directed by different people. Mulan in 1998 was produced by Tony Bancrof and Barry Cook. And the newest version of Mulan was directed by Niki Caro. To be able to analyze more deeply the discourse contained in the film, it is necessary to know the development and differences in both of the films.

2.3.1 Mulan (1998)

Mulan (1998) is an animated musical comedy-adventure drama film produced by Walt Disney Feature Animation and released by Walt Disney Pictures on June 19, 1998. It is the 36th entry in the Disney Animated Canon and the ninth film of the Disney Renaissance. Based on the Chinese legend of Hua Mulan, it was the first of three films created mainly at the Disney-MGM Studios animation facility in Orlando, Florida. The story follows Mulan, the only child in her esteemed family. When the Huns invade China, each family is required to send a man to fight. Mulan's father, who suffers from

an old injury and is unable to walk properly, is determined to fight for his country and family's honor despite his imminent danger. After being rejected by the matchmaker, Mulan, seeking to prove her worth, disguises herself as a man and takes her father's place in the army. She prays for protection and good fortune from her ancestors before setting off in her father's armor with the family's horse.

The ancestors awaken and decide to send Mushu, a small Chinese dragon who has been roused by the family's First Ancestor. Mushu, previously demoted to the role of gong ringer due to a past error involving one of the ancestors, is chosen to awaken the "Great Stone Dragon" as a guardian for Mulan. However, he accidentally destroys the Dragon, but realizes this could be his chance to regain his status among the guardians if he helps Mulan become a war hero. Weeks later, Mulan and her fellow soldiers have completed their training camp and are heading north to confront the Huns.

The reception of 'Mulan' was generally positive, earning an 86% fresh rating on Rotten Tomatoes. Stephen Wong called the visuals "stunning," Kyle Suggs described them as "breathtaking," and Dan Jardine referred to them as "magnificently animated." The film was praised for its innovative approach. Fa Mulan stands out from other Disney heroines by being independent and courageous without being excessively glamorous. Film critic Roger Ebert awarded 'Mulan' three and a half stars out of four, noting that "Mulan is an impressive achievement, with a story and presentation comparable to 'Beauty and the Beast' and 'The Lion King'."

'Mulan' earned \$22.8 million in its opening weekend, making it the second highest-grossing film of that week, trailing behind *The X-Files*. It eventually grossed \$120 million domestically and \$304 million worldwide, ranking as the second highest-grossing family film of the year, behind *A Bug's Life* and the seventh highest overall. The film received several Annie Awards, including Best Animated Theatrical Feature. It was also nominated for an Academy Award for Best Original Music Score in 1998 but lost to Stephen Warbeck's score for *Shakespeare in Love*. The music score for 'Mulan' also received considerable acclaim.

2.3.2 Mulan (2020)

'Mulan' (2020) is an action drama film produced by Walt Disney Pictures and serves as a live-action adaptation of Disney's 1998 animated film of the same name. Although it was initially planned for a theatrical release, the film was instead released on September 4, 2020, as a Disney+ exclusive with a premium fee. It was also released in theaters in regions where Disney+ was not available. This change in release strategy was due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the closure of most movie theaters across North America.

The live-action version of 'Mulan' features a different plot and set of characters compared to the animated version. Some characters from the animated film are absent in the live-action adaptation. For example, Mulan's family name changes from "Fa" to "Hua," and Mushu does not appear in the new version. Additionally, the live-action film does not include any of the original songs, opting instead for instrumental versions of the original music. Director Niki Caro explained that the songs were removed because they did not align with her realistic vision of the film, as she felt that characters should not spontaneously break into song during wartime. However, Matthew Wilder, who co-wrote the original film's songs, later mentioned that the remake would feature a new version of the song "Reflection," which plays a significant thematic role throughout the score of the new film.

Before the film's release, critics were given the opportunity to stream 'Mulan' for review purposes, with the embargo on these reviews lifted on September 3rd. The film received generally positive feedback, earning a 72% rating on Rotten Tomatoes from 308 reviews and a 66% score on Metacritic from 52 reviews. Critics who praised 'Mulan' included Laura Prudom of IGN, who described it as a "confident blend of old and new, concealing a familiar heart beneath action-packed armor." Leah Greenblatt of Entertainment Weekly noted that "Mulan might be the closest thing to a true old-fashioned theater-going experience that the end of this unusual summer will offer."

'Mulan' earned \$5.9 million from nine countries during its international opening weekend, including \$1.2 million in Thailand and \$700,000 in Singapore, both of which were the highest debuts of 2020 in those countries. It also grossed \$800,000 each in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. Several factors, including the relatively common representation of Asians in blockbuster films in China compared to American films and the availability of pirated copies online due to the film's Disney+ digital release, led many to predict that 'Mulan' might underperform at the Chinese box office. However, the film earned RMB 52.5 million on its first day in China, including previews.