Representation of Liberal Feminism on the 2020 Mulan Movie

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore the characteristics of Mulan as the only female soldier of the Chinese emperor in challenging the stereotypes of women that have been formed in society. The film shows Mulan's adventures as the only female soldier of the Chinese emperor. This research method uses a qualitative descriptive approach through observation and analysis of each scene and narrative available to explore the feminist values contained in this film. There were findings that Hua Mulan made efforts to challenge the stereotypes that developed regarding women. Hua Mulan challenges the boundaries that society places on women. In conclusion, Hua Mulan shows the characteristics of liberal feminism in the character Mulan which focuses on individual rights in obtaining opportunities, changes in social and legal policies that are no different for women.

1. Introduction

The Walt Disney Company is aggressively reviving the story of the Disney princesses which was originally packaged in the form of an animated film and then reproduced into a live action film. This means that in the production process each character is no longer played by moving images but is played directly by humans. Of course, with the aim of being able to experience the story of the Disney princesses closer and more real to the lives of the audience (Prakosa, 2010). Starting from the film a sleeping beauty who meets an evil witch named Malfiencent which was then adapted into a live action film in 2014. Then followed by several other films until the film Mulan 2020. The Walt Disney Company hired Niki Caro as the director in making the film Mulan 2020. The 2020 film Mulan received an award at the 2020 People's Choice Awards and became the winner in the 2020 Favorite Action Film category (Malec, 2020).

The 2020 film Mulan tells the story of a young girl from mainland China who disguises herself as a boy. This disguise was done to replace his father who was sick but had to fulfill the call of the

Chinese emperor to participate in the war. Several scenes in the film show that women have limited space for movement. Women do not receive the same rights as men. For example, a girl is born to get married, that way she succeeds in bringing honor to her parents. This assumption can be seen in the scene when the matchmaker says the Hua family has failed in giving birth and raising children (Sort & Nielsen, 2018). Mulan is a disgrace to her family just because she didn't get a husband. Even when women have power, society will think that it is something bad and dangerous. As Mulan's father said to Mulan, that the Chi or power within women is not the power of warriors but women who have power, they are witches (Sutherland & Feltey, 2017).

Overall, this film depicts the efforts of a woman who challenges the stereotypes that develop in her country. She fought for the rights that women should have even though they were opposed (Seceleanu, 2017). The author sees that these practices can be linked to the concept of feminism (Keohane, 2020). As we know, feminism is the belief that women, simply because they are women, are treated unfairly in a society that is structured to prioritize men's views and interests (Gamble, 2010).

Different from the animated version directed by Tony Bancroft and Barry Cook, Niki Caro chose to present the film in a more serious tone by eliminating the characters Mushu and commander Li Shang, and it is more tense by hearing the sound of swords rubbing more often than singing. In an interview, Niki Caro explained the reasons why her work was made the way it was - not against or against the animated film, but Niki Caro tried to invite the audience to think realistically. There are scenes that are removed according to existing reality. On the battlefield what needs to be prepared is not the song to be sung, but the strategy, tools to be used, and how to overcome the chaos that will occur (CNN, 2019).

The related previous research is the Representation of Liberal Feminism in Animated Films (Semiotic Study of the Character 'Mulan' in the Disney film Mulan). This research focuses on the character of Mulan, creating a new myth, namely that as long as a woman can make changes, she can be in the public sphere. In other words, there has been a change in representation that women should only be in the private sphere (Mutiarahmanika, 2020). Further research: Women Against Women's Issues (Sara Mills Discourse Analysis Study of the Film Betting At Stake 2008). The results show that there is a form of resistance in the 2008 film Betting At Stake, namely resistance to eastern culture, patriarchy and religion (Hasanah, 2018). The next related research is the Reception of Husband and Wife Couples towards Shifting Gender Roles in the RCTI Soap Opera Upside Down World (Stuart Hall Model Reception Analysis). This study took samples from three married couples at different socio-economic levels. The results show a change in views towards the role of men and women. Women are not only seen as weak figures as is usually portrayed in the media, apart from

that there is also a shift in the roles of both men and women in society which are flexible and interchangeable (Ariya, 2018).

From this explanation, there has been no research that reviews the character of Mulan in the live-action version fighting for and getting her rights, especially regarding feminism. Thus, this article was written to describe what the character Mulan is like as portrayed by Niki Caro in the 2020 Disney film Mulan.

2. Method

This research is a type of qualitative descriptive research that analyzes social phenomena in humans, both individually and in groups. Researchers will let problems emerge from the data first and then draw conclusions (Almanshur, 2012). Researchers will use Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis to examine the position of women in the film Mulan (Mayesti et al., 2019). One of the characteristics of qualitative descriptive research is that it lies in the presentation of research results consisting of a collection of quotes and images, not numerical data (Moleong, 2006).

The object of this research is the film produced by Walt Disney with the title "Mulan 2020". This film is primary data used by the author in observing the scenes and dialogues. The secondary data is in the form of a literature review in the form of books, journals and related online articles.

The data collection technique used in this paper is documentation (storage) of the 2020 Mulan film, then continued with observations of the film in relation to feminism. Then through the data analysis stages of the Miles and Huberman model, namely data reduction, data presentation, following conclusions and verification.

3. Theoretical Framework

Nature Theory

Nature theory is a theory that examines gender analysis by describing the differences in responsibilities, functions and roles between women and men which are based on nature or provisions from God and apply universally (Hogan & Sherman, 2020). Apart from that, the biological anatomy between women and men is also a major factor in determining different social roles and tasks in society (Patten & Williams, 2014). These natural differences arise from inherent feminine and masculine attributes, thus creating what a woman and a man should do and not do. There are roles and tasks that can be exchanged, but there are those that cannot, because they are different by nature, therefore the existing differences are natural and must be accepted.

Representation

Representation is a process of how the world is socially constructed and represented to and by us, which requires us to explore the formation of textual meaning, and understand how this meaning is formed in various contexts (Barker, 2008). Representation connects concepts in our

minds using language that allows us to interpret objects, people, real events, and the imagined world of objects or events that are not real (Hall, 2003). According to Hall (2003), there are three approaches to representation, namely as follows: intuitionist, reflective and constructionist approaches. This approach is an approach that explains an author is able to impose his or her unique meaning on the world through language. What this means is that a meaning is created by the speaker personally, other parties have no right to change the meaning and can only accept or follow it. The reflective approach assumes that meaning lies in an object, idea, event, or person himself. Then language functions as a reflection of true meaning. So from this approach there is a true meaning or meaning that cannot be changed or replaced and this meaning is attached to an object, person or event depicted. Meanwhile, the constructionist approach is an approach that assumes that meaning is created by a sign which is then arranged into different languages. Language can use signs to symbolize, represent, or describe objects, people, or events in the real world, it can refer to imaginary things and fantasy worlds or abstract ideas that are not actually part of the material world. According to Stuart Hall (1997), to understand this approach can be done using two approaches, namely the semiotic approach and the discursive approach.

Sara Mils' Critical Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is interested in original (written) texts as well as spoken (verbal) texts which are studied both as a whole and in certain contexts (Starr et al., 2022). The concept of discourse analysis does not only use methods developed by Foucault which are often used, but is broader than that. One of those who developed the concept of discourse analysis was Sara Mills.

Critical discourse analysis from Sara Mils displays women in texts, whether in news, novels, images or photos. Sara Mills wrote a lot of discourse theory with a focus on discourse regarding feminism, such as how women are depicted in texts (Hussain et al., 2020) . This discourse model is often referred to as feminist perspective discourse analysis. The following is an overview of the methods that will be used by researchers, according to (Eriyanto, 2011): (1) Subject-Object Position: Subject position here means who the character is who will define or describe and carry out the story. Meanwhile, the object position is a character or party whose presence is defined and described by other people. (2) Listener/Viewer Position: In Sara Mills' model, you don't only see one side of the author, but the reader also gets an important position and needs to be considered in the text. The text is the result of negotiations between the writer and the reader. With this, the reader is not only the party who is the recipient of the text, but also the party carrying out the transaction as will be seen in the text.

Liberal Feminism

In fact, women and men have the same cognitive abilities. Unfortunately, what happens is that society grows and develops in a circle where a person's role or position is determined based on

their gender, that someone will put a stamp on what should be appropriate for women to do and what is more appropriate for men to do.

From this phenomenon, a feminist ideology or movement was born, namely a belief that women, simply because they are women, are treated unfairly in a society that is formed to prioritize men's views and their interests. Where men are considered strong, women are weak, men are considered rational, women are emotional, men are considered active and women are seen as passive (Gamble, 2010). According to Sarah Gamble, feminism is defined as all efforts to confront the manifestations of the patriarchal system. These power relationships take many forms ranging from the classification of work according to gender and empowerment in social organizations, to internalized norms of femininity in our lives. Patriarchal power rests on social meanings based on gender (Gamble, 2010). Until finally the feminist movement emerged which was defined as a movement for social, political and economic equality for women, 71% of women and 61% of men agreed with the movement Baumgardner & Richards in (Wood, 2012).

Historically, feminism has been divided into three waves according to Wood (2012), as follows: the first wave, this movement aimed to increase women's political rights. Individual rights must be given priority, because rights are a way for individuals to choose what is best for them—as well as rights for women (Fitri, 2009). The second wave came with several goals. From this wave emerged the flow of radical feminism, lesbian feminism, liberal feminism, and multiracial feminism. Meanwhile, the third wave includes various ethnicities, abilities, class, appearance and sexual orientation. This wave has the spirit of wanting to end violence against women and motherhood.

Liberal feminism, which is the focus of this article, is a movement that focuses on individual rights and equal opportunities (Hannam, 2007). Karim (2014) also explains that the main demand of liberal feminism is equal rights for men and women with individual freedom and happiness. This school's concept is the freedom of every individual's right to choose without feeling constrained by public opinion and the law Karim in (Ulfa et al., 2021). One feminist activist who channels her thoughts with Instagram social media is Kalis Mardiasih. She realized that there was a form of discrimination that occurred against women due to misinterpretation of Qur'anic verses in Islam (Mutiara & Wenerda, 2022).

4. Result and Discussion

In this section the author will describe the results of research using Stuart Hall's representation theory to find representations of feminism in the film Mulan 2020. Then the author will analyze it using Sara Mills' critical discourse. In observations, the author groups observation data based on the position of subject, object and reader, as is typical of Sara Mills' critical discourse.

In the subject position there are 19 scenes that show Mulan as a player or acting out a role with certain activities.
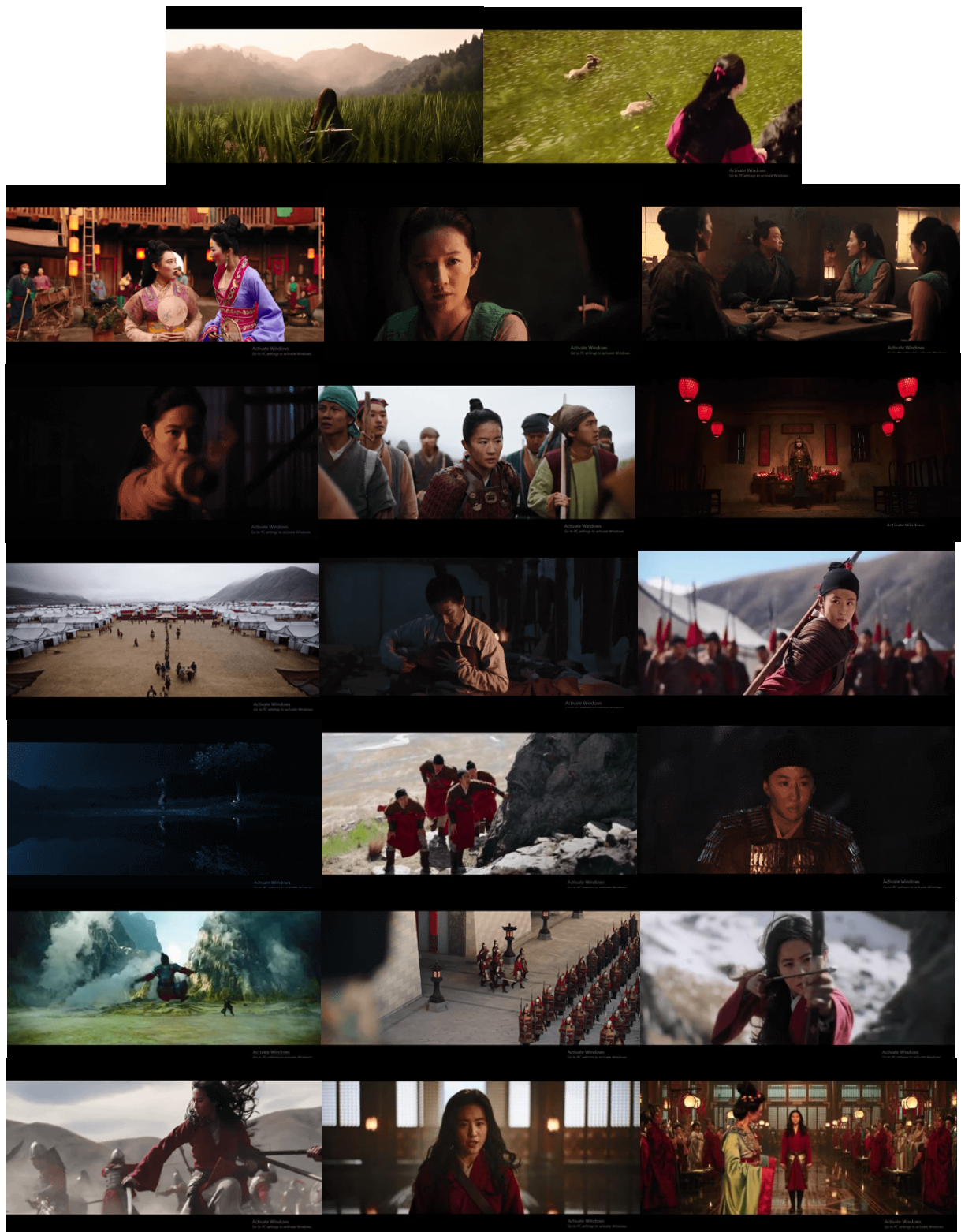
Fig. 1.   19 scenes that show Mulan as a player
Source: Screenshot of the researcher, in 2023

The scenes above show that the feminist movement in China is progressing, from demands for gender equality, gaining recognition, to being given freedom of speech. This increase is influenced, in part, by education. The figure of Mulan is shown as an intelligent and talented woman in the field of martial arts. Mulan also has a different thinking pattern from her environment. According to him, women are not enough just by their physical appearance. With a dominant patriarchal culture, Chinese women are ready to be arranged for marriage by a matchmaker when they have enough time. However, with a different mindset, when Mulan was betrothed she preferred to replace her father in the army. With this action, Mulan began to show liberal feminism because she showed that she as a woman was not only in the domestic sector but also took part in the public sphere and also exercised her right to make decisions.

Meanwhile, in the object position, Mulan is in the position told by the other subjects. The position of the Mulan object is shown in 11 scenes.
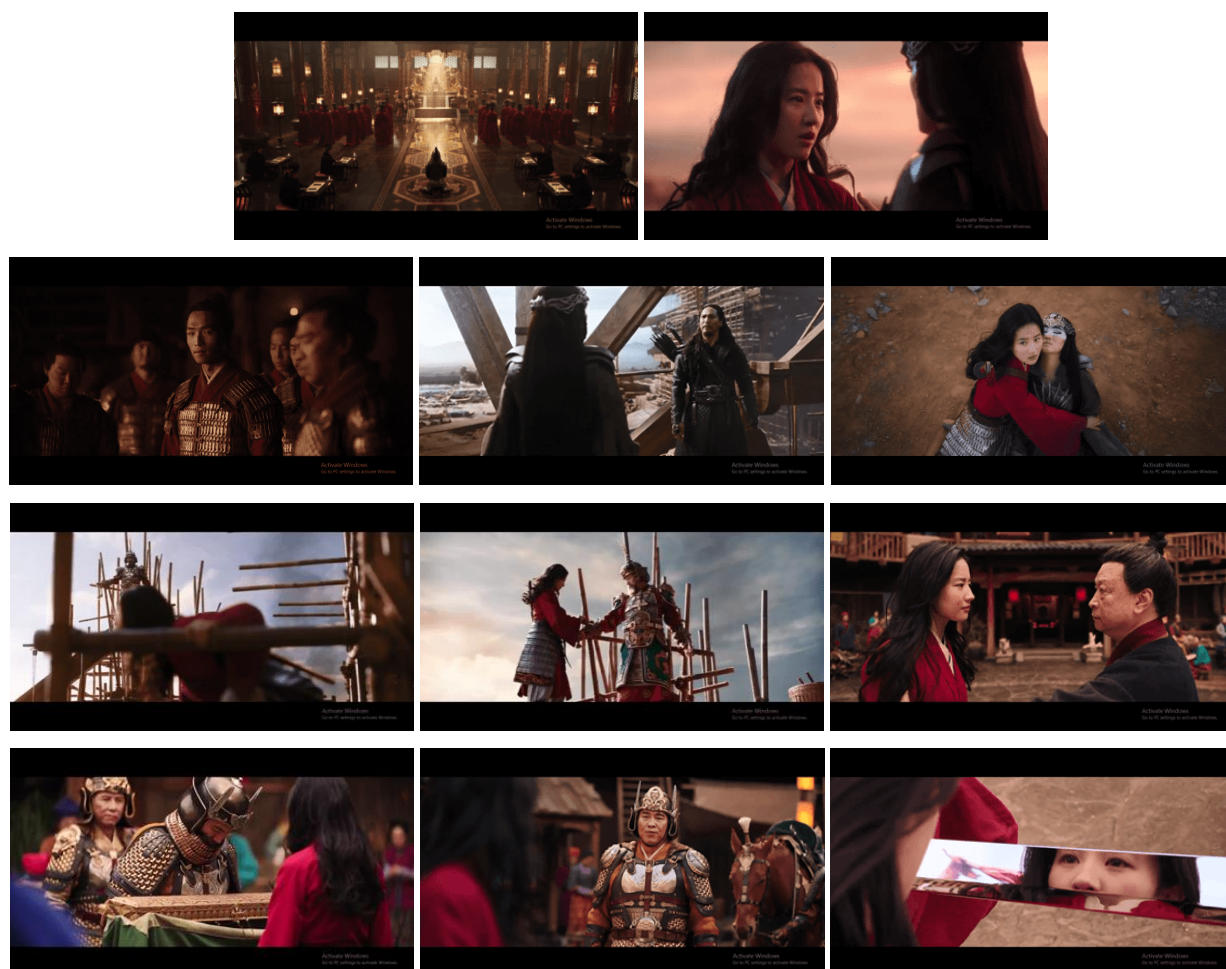

Fig. 2.   11 scenes that show Mulan as object position
Source: Screenshot of the researcher, in 2023

The scenes above show that the people around Mulan are starting to realize the acts of feminism she is carrying out, both from female and male actors. This was confirmed by Tri Yuni Ariya in her

research entitled Receptions of Husband and Wife Couples towards Shifting Gender Roles in the Soap Opera Upside Down World RCTI (Reception Analysis of the Stuart Hall Model) (Ariya, 2018). The position of the reader or viewer of the film Mulan 2020 is not directly able to suggest or influence the audience to place themselves in certain characters in the film Mulan, this is what is called the mediation process. The audience can feel the emotions conveyed by Mulan in response to patriarchal domination. Women's positions are often confined to the domestic sphere only. Even though women have the right to choose between domestic and public.
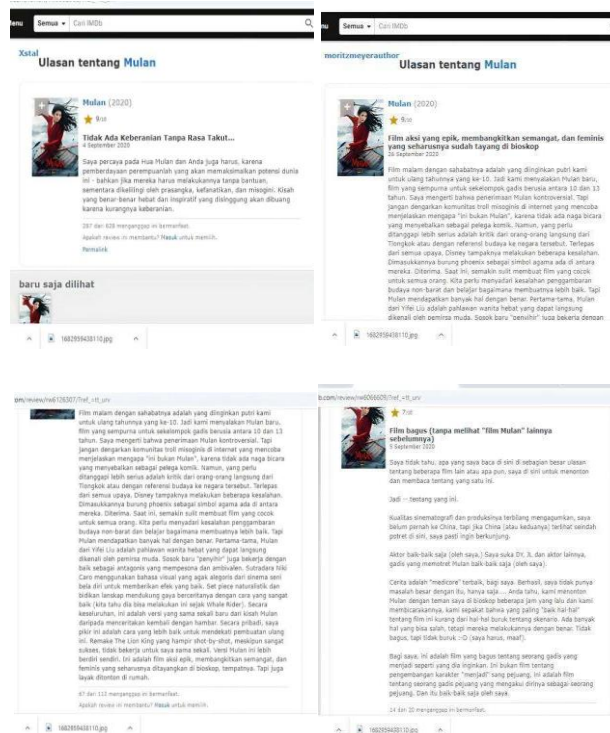
Fig. 3.   The position of the reader or viewer of the film Mulan 2020
Source: https://www.imdb.com/review/rw6062065/?ref_=tt_urv

The Walt Disney & Niki Caro

The 2020 film Mulan is a film that tells the story of women being able to take on more roles than just getting married and taking care of the house. The picture seen in the film is the social life of a woman who lives or lives in an environment that is thick with gender discrimination. This film is presented to show that women who are in a patriarchal environment are shown to be domesticated after marriage, taking care of the house and serving their husbands. Society believes that the honor for women is marriage, even though this assumption is the result of society's construction.

The 2020 Mulan film is a project from The Walt Disney Company. The Walt Disney team hired Niki Naro as director to work on this film. It is not the first time that Walt Disney has worked on or produced films with a feminist nuance, in his previous films he often featured stories of women equalizing their position with men, both in the form of animated films and live action films. Likewise

Niki Caro, Niki Caro is a director and also a feminist activist. Most of her works tell stories about women in terms of roles, rights and equality between women and men. She is also active in voicing various things about women, one of which is that she took to the streets in Poland for the 2017 Women's March in Warsaw. . He spoke about the gender imbalance in the film industry.

Niki Caro's name has reached the ears of the Walt Disney media company. In 2017, Niki Caro was hired by the Walt Disney Company to direct the live-action remake of "Mulan 1998" under the title "Mulan 2020" with Jason Reed as Producer. Niki Caro is the second female film director trusted by Disney to direct a big-budget film. , after Ava DuVernay in 1972. Niki Caro's remake was released in 2020 via Disneyplus.

The purpose of this study is to be able to show how women are portrayed in text, namely through the film Mulan 2020 using Sara Mils' critical discourse analysis. Using Sara Mills' discourse analysis, the author was able to prove that Mulan was shown through scenes that attempted to break patriarchal ideology while being the emperor's only female soldier. These efforts are identified through the subject-object position method and the audience/listener's opinion when watching Mulan 2020.

5. Conclusion

Based on the description above, it shows that Mulan 2020 features a representation of liberal feminism. In several scenes ranging from the position of the subject and object: Mulan shows and is shown an active position as the only woman who becomes the emperor's soldier. Even in the position of the reader—according to the reader, the subject of Mulan is also shown as a woman who breaks gender bias due to patriarchal culture. Mulan is surrounded by people who support her actions in breaking the patriarchal culture. Likewise in the position of the reader. This film presents audience reactions that are in line with Mulan's energy in fighting for her rights as a woman. The recommendation for the next study is to question the audience's reception while watching Mulan 2020. The focus of audience reception research is how audience acceptance of Mulan is shown in scenes fighting for her position as a woman. generally uses Stuart Hall's theory of encoding and decoding.

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