

## ANALYSIS OF LIBERAL FEMINISM IN THE NOVEL MULAN'S SECRET PLAN BY TESSA ROEHL

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**Abstract**— The aims of this study are to identify the liberal feminism that found in the novel *Mulan's Secret Plan* by Tessa Roehl. In liberal feminism women should have a same right and same opportunity as a man. The liberal feminism could be seen in the character of Mulan in the novel *Mulan's Secret Plan*. Mulan struggled for her right to get educational opportunities same as man and struggle for her right to freely choose what she wants to do. In order to understand how the aspect of liberal feminism were found in the novel, the theory of liberal feminism proposed by (Tong, 2008) were utilized in this study. This study used observation method to collect the data and qualitative method to analyze data. The result of this study indicates the aspect of liberal feminism in Mulan character were equal education and equal liberty.

**Keywords**— Liberal feminism; Novel *Mulan's Secret Plan*; Equal Liberty; Equal Education.

### 1. Introduction

Literature is a verbal or written work which contains the author's ideas and packaged aesthetically. Novel is one piece of literature. Novel is a work which clearly tells about some story regarding a person's life or experiences. *Mulan Secret's Plan* is a novel composed by popular author of children story named Tessa Roehl and illustrated by Denise Shimabukoro. This novel was published in 2020 and printed by Disney Press. Mulan is one of the Disney princess characters who has different personality compared to other princesses. The other princesses mostly dream of finding the right prince to marry in the future. However, Mulan showed that women could do something for society like men they could do things for society instead of waiting for her prince to do. The biggest and most popular story that she has done was when one male from one family in her village should be sent to military training to join the war. It happened that, in Mulan's family there was only her father who was eligible to join military training, but Mulan's father had fallen ill at that time and was unable to join the war. Finally, Mulan decided to disguise herself as a man to replace her father to the military training and join the war. Mulan had proven herself to be usually capable to men in every aspect and she did achieve great status and victories in the military. This story came from China and became popular in the world (Caro, 2020).

Before all that Mulan's biggest story began, she was just a bold and brave girl who wanted to have the same right and education as boys. In ancient China, school and educational opportunities were reserved for boys and men, nobles and the aristocracy, while young women were taught domestic skills in the home. So here the girls come to the matchmaker class to learn basic skills to become a nice woman and get a nice husband in the future based on their ability as a girl. It is unlikely that a matchmaker class like the one in this story would have taken place in real life nowadays. Here Mulan wouldn't have been very happy being denied by the matchmaker and did not get education while the boys got a lot of chance to learn. She would certainly have done something about it (Roehl, 2020). However, Mulan had passed through many obstacles but she never

gave up. Until she was able to prove to her family and society that girls could do the same things as what boys did. This novel is telling about the obstacles and the struggle that Mulan should pass to get her right when she was a kid. In this study The writer will focus on the idea of equality of the central concept of Liberal Feminism.

Liberal Feminism is the movement of woman to become equal as man in various fields. According to (Tong, 2008), Liberal Feminism is equality of opportunity. It means women and men have equality of opportunity, that is, they have the same right as well as the same opportunity to develop themselves in many aspects of life. This study aims to identify the aspect of liberal feminism that found in the novel *Mulan's Secret's Plan* by Tessa Roehl.

## 2. Literature Review

The first review literature taken from thesis entitled "Struggle of Woman in the novel *Sing Me To Sleep* by Angela Morrison (The Analysis of Feminism)" which was written by (Sudarni, 2017). The similarities and differences between both studies are analyzing about Feminism in the novel. She used *Sing Me To Sleep* as the data source. Meanwhile the writer uses *Mulan's Secret Plan* as the data source. She used theory of feminism proposed by (Hannam, 2007) and liberal feminism theory by (Arivia Gadis, 2003). Meanwhile in this study the writer used feminism theory that proposed by (Schwartzman, 2006) and liberal feminism theory by (Tong, 2008).

The second review literature taken from thesis entitled "Liberal Feminism as Reflected in The Main Character of *Joy Movie*" by (Eidelweis, 2018). The similarities and differences between the studies is both the study is analyzing Liberal Feminism. She used theory that proposed by (Mill, 1985) meanwhile the writer used theory that proposed by (Tong, 2008). She used movie as the data source meanwhile the writer used novel as the data source.

## 3. Materials and Method

### 3.1 Materials

#### Liberal Feminism

According to Rosemarie Tong's in her book *Feminist Thought* (Tong, 2008), there are some aspects that become the focus for the women struggle such as equal education, equal liberty, equal right as explained further below.

#### Equal Education

Women as well as men have this capacity. Thus, society owes girls the same education that it owes to boys, simply because all human beings deserve an equal chance to develop their rational and moral capacities so that they can achieve full personhood. For example, woman do not only help their parents at home to take care of the farm or to handle their household works. They should be educated so they are able to have a good rational and moral abilities such as patience, obedience and flexibility by which then they are able to develop their confidence and take care and educate their children better. Because of that women should have opportunities in education in the same way as men written by (Tong, 2008).

#### Equal Liberty

The ordinary way to maximize happiness is to permit individuals to pursue their desires, provided the individuals do not hinder or obstruct each other in the process. If sexual equality, or gender justice want to be achieved, then the political right and economic opportunity of the women must be provided by the society through the same education that men enjoy. For example, women are liberty to determine what careers they want to do, they are free to choose whether to handle households or go outside to work. They can lead a company or do another job in the same way as man do without care about the gender (Tong, 2008).

#### Equal Right

As human beings, woman is the same as men. Therefore, women have a right to equal treatment. Women need economic opportunities and sexual freedom as well as civil liberties to be fully liberated. All citizens have the same right to take part in the government of his or her country. One of them is the right for suffrage in order to become men's equals. They claim that the vote gives people the power not only to express their own political views but also to change those systems, structures, and attitudes that contribute to

their interest. For example, in the election women should have right to vote, or to stand for the election to be leader in the government. They should be free to speak up and use their expression (Tong, 2008).

### 3.2 Method

The data of this study were taken from novel *Disney Before the Story: Mulan's Secret Plan* by Tessa Roehl and illustrated by Denise Shimabukuro. This novel interesting to analyze since Mulan is a famous story in the world that showed a lot of aspects feminism through the story of her life. She joins the war at that time even when a woman is forbidden to join the war. Before Mulan's biggest story began, she was just an ordinary girl who wanted to be educated in the way same as boy.

The study was conducted by observation and note taking technique. Firstly, the writer read the novel carefully and repeatedly for several times to get maximum understanding about the contents of the novel to prevent misunderstanding in analyzing the character. Second, the writer collected the data through dialogue, noting the behavior, and action while relating the novel to the theory of Liberal Feminism.

The data was analyzed using qualitative method based on the theoretical framework being adopted. The analysis was started by reading carefully and understanding the novel. Then the problem of the study was analyzed by means of the theory of liberal feminism proposed by (Tong, 2008).

## 4. Result and Discussion

### [1] Result

Result is the method that is used for describing the general analysis. In the theory of liberal feminism proposed by Tong, there were three aspects that become women's concern in the struggle such as equal education, equal liberty, and equal right. Meanwhile, in this study the aspects found in Mulan character are equal education and equal liberty.

**Table 4.1 Equal Education and Equal Liberty found in Novel *Mulan's Secret Plan*.**

NO.	Data	Target of Liberal Feminist Struggle
1.	Mulan's mother told her that she would attend the school as the boys did. Because girl and boy are different in terms of the lesson that they learn. Meanwhile Mulan has known that boy and girl will learn different things (Roehl 2020:6-7)	Equal Education
2.	Mulan saw a group of boys entering the gate of the school that she wanted to enter but her mother pulled her hand through the school gate (Roehl 2020:10)	Equal Education
3	She just has a little chance to go outside because she is a girl. So, she is very happy if she could go outside her home's walls (Roehl 2020:8).	Equal Liberty
4	Mulan gazes on the boys that learning Kungfu guided by their teacher, something that Mulan really wants to learn. But instead of learning Kungfu she should learn how to wear makeup (Roehl 2020:54-55)	Equal Education
5	She practicing alone the Kungfu skill which she saw the day before, from the boys' school (Roehl 2020:80)	Equal Education
6	Mulan and her friends learn in secret (Roehl 2020:105-110)	Equal Education

### [2] Discussion

The aspect of liberal feminism particularly discussed equal liberty and equal education. Mulan as a character struggles for her freedom to get the same educational opportunities and also her right to do what she wanted.

### 3.2.1 Equal Education.

(Wollstonecraft, 1759) states that emotional and dependent women, who routinely shirk their domestic duties and indulge into their carnal desires, while rational and independent women will tend to be “observant daughters” “affectionate sisters” “faithful wives” and “reasonable mothers”. The truly educated woman will be a major contributor to society’s welfare. This is shown by Mulan in the story. She is an observant daughter who cares for society. That is why women must be educating because they will educate their children in the future. Not only to educate their children, women should be educated because the knowledge and skill that she has, could protect and help her in certain situations later.

#### 1) Data 1

After hearing what Mulan had said Mulan’s mother and her grandmother stared at each other. They tried to tell her that she would not attend the school as the boys did. Because girls and boys are different in terms of the lesson that they learn. Meanwhile Mulan has known that boys and girls will learn different things. So, she would not be disappointed later when she knows. As found in finding 1 and explained in the story below:

Grandmother Fa and Mulan’s mother exchanged a look. The room was quite for a few moments as they all sat down to eat.

**"Mulan," her mother said finally. Mulan looked up from her breakfast. "Remember that this may not be the kind of school you are expecting. You will learn things-important things. But they won't be the same things your father learned. It won't be quite like the school the boys attend. And the lessons are only for six weeks"**

**"Mulan knew this. Her mother and grandmother had been cautioning her about it ever since they announced that Mulan would start attending a class with the other village girls.**

**"I know, Mother, "Mulan said. "But I can still be excited, can't I?"**

"Yes" her mother replied. She squeezed her daughter's hand. "You certainly can."

Her grandmother winked. "A little excitement never hurts" (Roehl 2020:6-7)

The story above explains that Mulan insists on going school but hindered because she is a woman. She really wants to attend the school that her father attends when he was a kid but the rules in the society do not allow a woman to go to school. That is why her mother tries to tell Mulan about the school that she will attend which is different from the school that her father or boys attend. Her mother told her about this in the beginning to avoid Mulan’s disappointed later. After hearing about what her mother is being told, Mulan becomes disappointed and breaks her expectation about what the school will be. This proves that Mulan did not have the same equal education as men.

#### 2) Data 2

After finishing their breakfast Mulan’s mother and grandmother escorted her from their home to the village. Mulan’s village was small enough that she knew most of the people, but she did not know everyone. She was often busy doing chores and spending time with her family. She was very happy to have a chance to go outside. The most exciting thing that she loves to see is when the small parade of students enters the school gate for lessons. As found in finding 2 and explained in the story:

**Today, for once, Mulan was focused on what she would be learning when she walked into school, rather than on what the boys would be learning.**

**But to her surprise, her mother and grandmother led her past the school and through the village to a house, where they stopped outside the gate. Mulan knew this house. Mei, a girl**

just one year older than Mulan, lived there. It was one of the largest homes in the village, though Mulan had never been inside.

Mulan gave her mother a confused look.

"I told you, Mulan. It's a different kind of school," her mother said.

**"But..." Mulan glanced back toward the schoolhouse, seeing the last of the boy's trickle through the door** (Roehl 2020:9-10).

The story describes how disappointed Mulan was when her mother pulled her hand through the school gate that she dreamed of. She just could look at the school when she passed the school building while seeing what the boys were doing inside. Equal education for women exists because of the judgement of different capability of women and men's intelligence. Society tends to doubt women's ability to develop all aspects of life. Mulan couldn't go to school like boys and her mother often reminded her that she would only attend the matchmaker's class not public schools.

### 3) Data 3

The time goes by Mulan had passed many struggles and still stuck in a problem. There have been many lessons about being a good woman based on the matchmaker's point of view that Mulan cannot understand. So many things that made her stressed and sad plus every time she came from matchmaker class, she saw the school that she really wants to attend. On her way back home Mulan gazes at the boys learning Kungfu guided by their teacher, something that Mulan really wants to learn. But instead of learning Kungfu she should learn how to wear makeup. As found in finding 4 and explained in the story below:

**Quietly, the girls washed up and left Mei's house. As Mulan headed home, her gaze drifted toward the schoolhouse. The boys were outside, practicing martial arts with their instructor. Mulan admired the way their arms moved with grace. The way their legs kicked with purpose.**

**Mulan knew the boys weren't learning martial arts so they would be able to please their eventual matches. She yearned to join the boys as she watched them practice a leap-kick combination, over and over. Who wanted to spend a day cooped up inside, next to each other but alone, crushing rice into powder for makeup, when it was possible to be leaping, kicking, and working as a team?**(Roehl 2020:54-55)

The story explains that Mulan had no freedom to choose what skill she wants to learn. She was forced to learn how to make up, how to cook, and behave with grace. Even though all she wanted was to learn martial arts. She cannot learn Kung Fu because she is a girl. This proved that Mulan did not get the same educational opportunities as boys. But Mulan never gave up. She still tries to do the best she can. Until finally she decided to lead her friends to study together after the matchmaker's class to understand each other's lessons. This opportunity encourages their passion and develops their confidence.

### 4) Data 4

The next morning after she told her friends to study together after the matchmaker class and all her friends agreed, Mulan felt as excited as she had on the first day of the matchmaker's classes. Today she practices alone the Kung Fu skill which she has looked at the day before from the boys' school. As found in finding 5 and explained in the story below:

The next morning, Mulan felt as excited as she had on the first day of the matchmaker classes. She and the other girls had agreed ask their parents for an extra hour away from home each day to spend studying. And they would be studying! It just wouldn't be with the matchmaker. And they would get to spend time with new friends, on top of it.

**Mulan felt so energized that, while she waited for the hens to eat their breakfast, she practiced the leap-kick combination she'd seen the village boys learning days earlier.** She practiced it again on the moon bridge (Roehl 2020: 79-80).

This part of the story explains that Mulan is a girl who never gives up, even though she doesn't get the opportunity to learn at school like boys but she still tries to learn what she wants to learn at home. Mulan began to get her happiness by her own way even if she is a girl. She practiced Kungfu from what she had looked the day before at the boys' school. She is also excited because she has made plans to study together with her friend after school. So that they can share the knowledge they have.

### 3.2.1 Equal Liberty

Each individual is free to do what she or he wants to do and take the most of her and himself. According to (Hay, 2013) "liberty should give individuals freedoms such as freedom from the unwanted interferences of others, freedom to live the life of one's choice, and freedom to choose one's own conception of the good". Simply, liberty means everyone deserves to choose or decide what they want to do or to make her own decision. In liberal feminism, women struggle for liberty because they had no freedom to choose their life and do whatever they wanted. The struggle of women to get equal liberty could be revealed through Mulan character in the novel *Mulan's Secret Plan* because Mulan had limited freedom to express her feelings and also determine her life because she is a girl. She has different duties and responsibilities. The evidences as to how Mulan struggles for her freedom could be seen in the story from the novel:

#### Data 3

On the first day Mulan went to the matchmaker's class escorted by her mother and grandmother. Mulan village was small enough that she could know most of the people, but she did not know everyone. She was often busy helping their parents doing chores and spending time with them. So she did not go into the village every day. So then, Mulan is very happy if she could go outside her home's walls. Because she just has a little chance to go outside. As found in finding 3 and explained in the story below:

She was often busy at home doing chores and spending time with her family, so she did not go into the village every day. **When she did have a chance to venture out, she loved seeing the sights of the world beyond her home's walls.** Stalls sold fresh fish brought in on carts from the neighboring town. Ladies walked around with baskets, buying food for their families (Roehl 2020:19)

From the story above we can conclude that Mulan had no freedom to go outside her house because she is a girl. So, when she has a chance to leave her house, she would not waste that opportunity to look around. In ancient China girls and boys had different gender roles which meant man and woman generally had different responsibilities. For example, a son and daughter will have different rules and responsibilities. Like shown by Mulan's story, she should do more household work because she is a girl, because in the society point of view when a woman marries in the future, she must be able to do all the household. Besides, the boys can go outside because they go to school. This proved that Mulan does not equal liberty to go outside as boys got. In this case the author draws Mulan's character by dramatic method because the character of Mulan is shown by the condition when she had no freedom to go outside.

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