CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Chapter one of this research discusses the background of the study, the research question, the objectives of the study, and the advantages of the study. This chapter provides a brief explanation of the Maleficent movie, the relationship between gender oppression and feminism, and the reasons why the researchers are interested in researching this topic.

A. Background of the Study

Gender oppression is an occurrence rooted in gender norms, relationships, and societal stratification passed down through generations, evolving into a phenomenon normalized by many. It is a pervasive issue, particularly affecting women in society. Furthermore, the patriarchal system positions men consistently above and superior to women, resulting in gender oppression manifesting through consumption patterns, perspectives, and societal thought patterns. The patriarchal culture assumes that supreme authority resides in the family and society. Abuse of power from this view causes women to be considered beneath men, do not have free rights, and only obey men (Hajir & Marsih, 2023).

In Thailand, Akha women experience oppression in their daily lives and activities; this arises because culture and society favor men over women (Wongnuch et al., 2023). The oppression of women is a prevalent issue in developing countries with traditional cultures, often exacerbated by low education levels. Despite advancements in some developed countries, gender problems persist. For instance, Dalit women in India face economic discrimination, are perceived as a financial burden, and lose their freedom to choose a life partner (Cherechés, 2023).

Injustice prevails within certain groups due to differing opinions about gender roles in society. Many families in traditional religions prefer sons over daughters (Wongnuch et al., 2023). Gender oppression persists in society; thus, it often occurs and has become a normalized phenomenon. This mindset is certainly detrimental to those feeling the impact of gender oppression in their lives. Society's belief in men having a higher position than women is an unwritten rule embraced by many. Females are consistently relegated to a secondary status, viewed as extensions of men and regarded as lowly entities (Movva et al., 2023). For example, women encounter difficulties securing high positions in companies compared to men, often underestimated as weak individuals. Additionally, the ongoing debate regarding the duties of husbands and wives reflects societal expectations that a wife should be a homemaker, responsible for housekeeping and caring for her husband and children, while men must work and earn money.

Gender oppression is a prevalent issue in society and is even depicted in fairy tale stories. It arises from societal constructions detrimental to the position of women, leading to oppression and control by men in patriarchal societies. This is evident in fairy tale movies, which are dominated by patriarchal ideologies that portray women as passive and submissive. Disney is one of the big

companies in the entertainment world that has the power to enchant their audience with timeless stories of classic fairy tales (Laemle, 2018).Walt Disney, a company contributing numerous memorable fantasy stories to children worldwide, has historically featured plots predominantly focusing on male characters, limiting female roles and mobility. Many female Disney characters play standard roles, such as housemaids, or play no part at all, serving as supporting characters to the male protagonist (Maity, 2014).

Until 2023, Disney has fourteen main female characters as official princesses: Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora, Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, Mulan, Tiana, Rapunzel, Merida, Moana, Raya, and Asha. Regardless of our age, we all often have an interest in fantasy worlds with extraordinary characters, a journey that begins in a happy and comfortable setting. This is an ideal world that many people and readers of the classic fairy tale dream of. A good character always spreads happiness for their surroundings, and they behave in the best possible way in line with the universal ethical rules, whatever the circumstances may be. This kind of character is always free from negative feelings such as hatred, anger, and envy; their feelings are pure, and they even always forgive their enemies. This classic fairy tale story addresses feelings more than rational thought. Disney princess stories not only shape our perceptions of women's appearances but also propagate the idea that women find happiness by meeting a man who becomes their soul mate and living together. These fairy tales often convey sexist undertones, suggesting that women should submit to a patriarchal system, thereby impacting and shaping their lives. Fairy tales are products created through male dominance in society, which prepares many young women to serve the existing patriarchal culture. (Hoey, 2020).

It is not surprising that feminist groups have been the main opponents of the fairy tale genre since the beginning of the 20th century, criticizing stories as a source of misogyny in society, given the emphasis on the limited ideas of femininity conveyed in tales. Classic tales have been rewritten by feminist authors into "non-sexist" versions suitable for both adults and children. This is an intriguing illustration of how a cross-cultural dialogue may bring a modern viewpoint to a traditionally composed work. One of feminists' main concerns is the way gender roles are constructed, which clearly suggests chauvinistic views. The stories create "positions to occupy" as male and female members of society, producing a "script" of how each gender should act.

In Disney's Mulan, there is a depiction of the social construction of a woman's gender role, namely, giving birth to a son and not being able to go to the battlefield. Whatever women do, no matter what kind of woman they are, it will not change the fact that women are still just women(Streiff & Dundes, 2017). Many fairy tales illustrate that the key to a woman's success is her beauty. Because of that, the only thing women can do is dress up beautifully and then have a good marriage (Gengcheng, n.d.). In "The Little Mermaid," Ariel has to sacrifice her beautiful voice to have legs; she also needs Eric to fulfill her dream of becoming human. This shows the dominance of men in a patriarchal society because Ariel needs Eric's kiss to make her dream come true with the sacrifice of her beautiful voice. By exchanging her ability to communicate and convey her intelligence and personality for the physically alluring symbol of human legs, Ariel becomes the woman that men desire her to be, and her sacrifice itself is a clear example of sexism (Maity, 2014).

In Beauty and the Beast, Belle, an intelligent woman, faces challenges to her potential from Gaston, who deems it inappropriate for a woman to read books. Additionally, Belle endures

emotional and verbal abuse from the Beast, suggesting that toxic relationships are deemed acceptable for women to garner affection from men (Laemle, 2018). Apart from that, in the story of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937), Snow White mainly cleans the house and cooks for the dwarfs, which supports the view that women are expected to do housework and serve others. She is also shown as a gentle and caring princess, which gives the idea that every woman should have caring and serene behavior (Laemle, 2018).

However, there have been notable changes in the formulation of fairy tale movies, particularly in Disney's approach. This has been greatly influenced by the achievement of modernism in the era of feelings, where many definitions of concepts have changed both in the fields of politics and social life. Classical understanding is losing its dominance, and many people are having difficulty coping with the problem of existence. A postmodernist attitude is a very complex thing, like real life itself. Naturally, this also influences the development of character in literary works. Maleficent (2014) stands out as a film where the antagonist is the main character, presenting a different perspective from the typical protagonist in Disney films. Maleficent is portrayed as a strong and brave female character, reimagining the traditional fairy tale narrative. Apparently Maleficent does manage to bring a new insight to its audience (Tarihi & Melda ÜNER, 2017).

Directed by Robert Stromberg with Linda Woolverton as the screenwriter, Maleficent is a Disney fantasy and adventure film inspired by Charles Perrault's original fairy tale in 1959 (Farnush et al., 2018). Released on May 30, 2014, Maleficent became a box office hit, earning over $758 million globally and securing a nomination for Best Costume Design at the 87th Academy Awards. This film's success marked it as Angelina Jolie's highest-grossing film and the fourth-highest-grossing film of 2014.

This story begins with two adjacent hostile kingdoms, namely the human kingdom and the Moors kingdom, inhabited by magical creatures with great power. These two kingdoms have always been enemies due to human greed, which is never satisfied and seeks to rule over the Moors. In this kingdom lives a fairy named Maleficent. She is a fairy with big, strong wings and horns on her head—a young fairy full of curiosity about human life in the opposite kingdom.

One day, a human boy broke in and stole jewels from the royal Moors' pool, causing an uproar among the Moors. The boy, named Stefan, is a poor orphan living in the Palace Warehouse. Maleficent took Stefan to the border between the Moors kingdom and the Human Empire, warning him not to come to the Moors again as it would be dangerous. However, Stefan said that if he came, Maleficent would also meet him, and they shook hands to show their good relationship. It was from that meeting that Maleficent and Stefan became close friends, and their relationship developed into love until Stefan kissed Maleficent on her 16th birthday.

As time passed, both Maleficent and Stefan continued to grow and live their lives. Maleficent became the strongest fairy in the Moors and the protector of all inhabitants from King Henry, the king of the human kingdom who wanted to conquer the Moors. One day, King Henry and his army came to the Moors to conquer the kingdom. Maleficent, the strongest fairy in the Moors, countered King Henry's troops with the rangers. In a short time, King Henry's troops were repelled by the

Moors' guards, and Maleficent dropped King Henry as a sign of defeat from the human kingdom's troops.

Consumed by revenge and deep anger towards Maleficent and the kingdom of Moors, King Henry, on his deathbed, declares that he will pass the throne, along with the right to marry his daughter, to anyone who manages to kill Maleficent for him. At that moment, Stefan, who was in the room and overheard King Henry's words, sensed an opportunity to fulfill his ambition. Having neglected Maleficent and the Moors for an extended period to pursue his kingship ambitions in the palace, he decided that night to visit Maleficent. Stefan informed Maleficent that he had come to warn her about King Henry's plan to kill her, convincing her to believe him. That night, Maleficent chose to trust Stefan's words, and they spent time sharing many things.

Stefan had intended to kill Maleficent in her sleep by giving her sleeping pills, but fear held him back. Instead, he opted to cut off Maleficent's wings with an iron chain. Maleficent woke up the next day feeling pain in her back, realizing her wings had disappeared. In that moment, Maleficent knew Stefan had betrayed her. With her loyal companion, Diaval, at her side, Maleficent becomes a beacon of strength for her enchanted homeland, fiercely guarding its borders against any who would seek to exploit its magic for personal gain.

One day, when the news of King Stefan being blessed with a daughter spread throughout the country, everyone rejoiced and gathered to witness the blessing of King Stefan's daughter. Maleficent, who also heard the news, arrived and shocked the people present at the palace. King Stefan, fearful of Maleficent's actions, placed a curse on Aurora, proclaiming that on her 16th birthday, she would prick her finger with a spinning wheel needle and fall into a deep sleep, resembling death. Only a true kiss could awaken her from the curse.

As Aurora grows under the care of three benevolent fairies in a secluded cottage, Maleficent watches over her from afar, her feelings for the girl evolving from a sense of duty to a profound affection. When Aurora's innocence is shattered by the revelation of her true heritage and the curse that hangs over her, Maleficent is consumed by guilt and determination to right the wrongs of her past.

When Aurora's sixteenth birthday arrives, Maleficent's worst fears are realized as the curse takes hold. Desperate to save the girl she has come to love as her own, Maleficent embarks on a daring rescue mission, confronting Stefan and his forces in a climactic battle for Aurora's fate. With a sad feeling, Maleficent looked at Aurora's sleeping face and expressed her feelings for her, telling her how much she loved her. Then Maleficent kissed Aurora's forehead, which managed to wake her up from the curse.

When Maleficent and Aurora tried to escape from the palace, Stefan's troops were already waiting for Maleficent. They wore armor and weapons made of iron. Under King Stefan's command, they managed to trap Maleficent with a net made of iron. Maleficent, who didn't succeed in fighting back, turned Diaval into a dragon to defeat Stefan's army, but it was in vain until Aurora managed to free her wings, which had been cut off by Stefan. Maleficent, who managed to get her wings back, fought against King Stefan's troops and escaped. However, King Stefan managed to entangle Maleficent's feet and flew up to the highest palace roof. There, Maleficent succeeded in bringing

down King Stefan and killed him. At the end of this story, Maleficent managed to defeat the darkness in her heart and returned to being a wise fairy. She then crowned Aurora as the princess who had succeeded in uniting the kingdom of Moors and the kingdom of humans.

The reason people are interested in Maleficent is because of her character as a villain from the original Fairy Sleeping Beauty. She is described as an evil witch who cursed Aurora to sleep forever. In this film by Robert Stromberg, the audience is brought to see another point of view of Maleficent, she is the strongest fairy in the Moors who ends up being hurt by her lover for the sake of power which makes her hate humans and curse Aurora. This film broke the discourse of the original fairy tale which saw Maleficent as just a villain and shifted Aurora's position as the main character. The character Maleficent has strength and power that comes out of the stereotype of the main character that often comes out of other fairy tales.

In this study, the researcher selected the film "Maleficent" (2014) as the primary subject of analysis. Several aspects of the film piqued the researcher's interest, with three distinct reasons identified: character, plot, and theme. Each reason contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the film's significance.

The initial reason revolves around the main character's experience of gender oppression in the movie. Maleficent, the central character, undergoes a transformative journey influenced by the societal construct of gender roles. This aspect of the film forms a crucial focal point for the researcher's analysis.

The second reason for the researcher's interest pertains to the intricacies of the movie's plot. The storyline of "Maleficent" captivates researchers due to its unique portrayal of the villain's journey from the original Sleeping Beauty narrative. Starting as a fairy protecting the Moors kingdom, Maleficent's character evolves through a complex narrative involving her love for Stefan, betrayal, and subsequent transformation into a vengeful fairy. This transformation ultimately leads to the familiar tale of Sleeping Beauty, where Maleficent curses Aurora. Throughout the film, Maleficent's character develops, as she transitions from a figure seeking revenge to one who develops a deep attachment to and protection for Aurora. The unconventional storyline of this Disney film adds an intriguing layer for the audience, portraying the multifaceted journey of a villain.

The third reason for the researcher's interest in the film lies in its thematic exploration, with a specific focus on gender oppression. In "Maleficent" (2014), the director introduces various themes, but the researcher singles out gender oppression due to its pervasive occurrence in contemporary society. The film serves as a platform to delve into and analyze the phenomenon of gender oppression, shedding light on its relevance and implications in today's world. This thematic focus aligns with the researcher's objective of exploring a societal issue through the lens of the chosen cinematic material.

Based on the above knowledge, the researcher is interested in researching the film Maleficent (2014) by Robert Stromberg to discuss the problems. The researcher chose the title of the research, Gender Oppression in Maleficent Movie (2014) by Robert Stromberg: A Feminist Perspective.

B. Research Question

Based on the background of the problem, the research question in this study are:

1. What are the main indicators of gender oppression in the Maleficent Movie by Robert Stromberg?
2. How is gender oppression depicted in Maleficent Movie by Robert Stromberg?
3. Why is gender oppression addressed in the Maleficent Movie?

C. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follow:

1. To identify indicators of gender oppression in Maleficent movie by Robert Stromberg.
2. To describe how gender oppression is depicted in Maleficent movie by Robert Stromberg.
3. To reveal reasons why gender oppression is discussed in the Maleficent movie by Robert Stromberg.

D. Advantages of Study

1. Theoretical Significance.
   This research in the field of knowledge, especially in literature research, can add a deeper understanding to the theory of gender oppression, which is part of the feminist movement. Apart from that, the results of this research can be used as reference material for future research by other researchers conducting research in the field of gender oppression, especially literature research on the film Maleficent (2014).

2. Practical Benefit.
   This research can provide references and inspiration for future research; apart from that, this research also enhances the author's knowledge regarding gender oppression and feminism in a more specific domain along with real practice, namely conducting research on the film Malefient (2014).