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**The Deconstruction of Feminism in Ghibli Animations:
*Kiki's Delivery Service, Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind and
Princess Mononoke***

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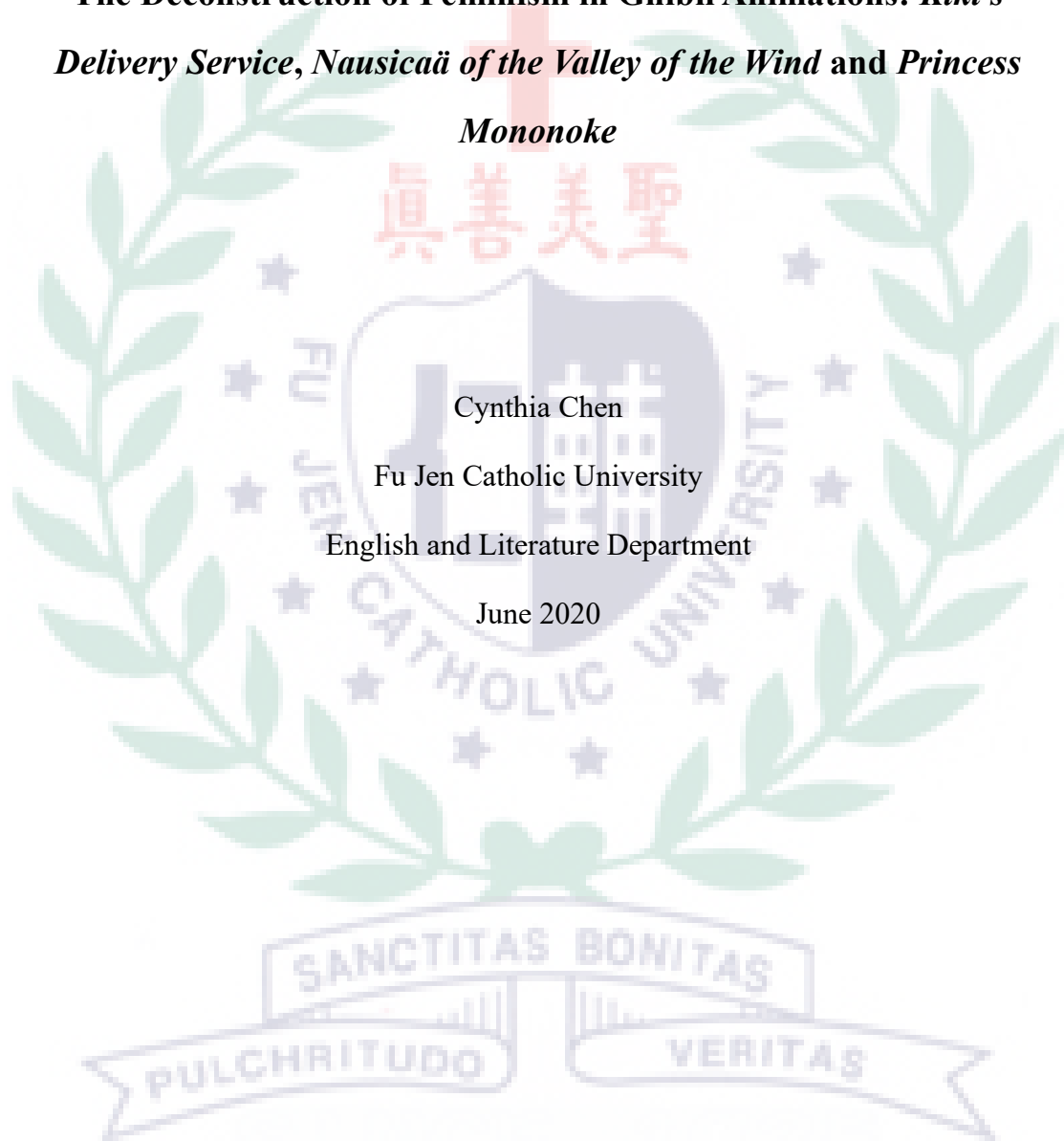
The Deconstruction of Feminism in Ghibli Animations: *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* and *Princess Mononoke*

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The Deconstruction of Feminism in Ghibli Animations: *Kiki's Delivery Service*,
Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind and *Princess Mononoke*

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Abstract

Chen, Cynthia. Section B. "The Deconstruction of Feminism in Ghibli Animations: *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* and *Princess Mononoke*." Hayao Miyazaki, the founder of Ghibli Studio depicts environmentalism and feminism in a way differs from the traditional one. *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* and *Princess Mononoke* are particularly three of Ghibli animations which strongly show woman power and heroine characteristics. By analyzing female roles in these three stories, this paper aims to take a closer look at how the concepts of ecofeminism, characteristics of independence and female warriors are displayed in different perspectives.



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The Destruction of Feminism in Three of Ghibli Animations: *Kiki's Delivery Service*,
Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind and *Princess Mononoke*

1. Introduction

Ghibli Studio founded by Hayao Miyazaki is a Japanese household studio producing gorgeous animations such as *Princess Mononoke*, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Spirited Away*, *Porco Rosso*, just to name a few. However, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* and *Princess Mononoke* are particularly three strong Ghibli films portraying feminism characteristics in different ways.

In *Kiki's Delivery Service*, Kiki breaks what traditional society look upon female. She leaves home to a strange town to start the voyage which represents the process of turning to a mature witch from a little one; she makes a living delivering packages with her magic broom. After overcoming all the difficulties during the journey, Kiki saves Tombo's life in an accident of a flying boat which is out of control. This also changes the impression which firstly comes to people's minds when mentioning the word "hero".

Apart from Kiki, Nausicaä also gives people a brand-new look at the definition of "hero". Living nearby the Toxic Jungle, Nausicaä not only protects her villagers from the attacks of giant mutant insects but also keeps a pleasing environment for insects to live. Compared to Nausicaä, Princess Kushana, the leader of Tolmekian troops, decides to massacre all giant mutant insects with horrible Giant Warriors. Angered by the plan, the giant mutant insects rush toward to Valley of the Wind furiously eventually. Nausicaä's sacrifice soothes insects' anger and rescue the valley.

Besides, *Princess Mononoke* also presents different perspectives of feminism from both economical aspect and anti-romantic one. San is abandoned by her human parents and raised up by Moro-no-kimi, the wolf God in the forests. After encountering the male role Ashitaka, she aims to protect the forests and fights against human and armies

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who ruin the environment with him together. In comparison with princess Mononoke's idea of ecofeminism, San's enemy Lady Ebilosh, the owner of the iron town ruins the forest for the resources and plays an important role in showing different ways of what a powerful woman might be like. Falling in love with a human but still deciding to live without man in the end make *Princess Mononoke* become one of the famous feminist Ghibli films.

In Ghibli Studio, Hayao Miyazaki paves a way which enables people to have a closer look at how feminism in his films is portrayed in different perspectives and the contrast between female protagonists and antagonists.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Radical Ecofeminism and Cultural Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism, also known as ecological feminism, is one of the branches of feminism which researches into the connection between women and environment. In "Ecofeminism: Sociology and Environmentalism," there are two schools of thought: the radical ecofeminism and the cultural one. According to Kathryn Miles, radical ecofeminism builds on the assertion of early ecofeminists that one must study patriarchal domination with an eye toward ending the associations between women and nature; in this theory, both women and nature have been associated with negative or commodifiable attributes while men have been seen as capable of establishing order. However, woman supporting the idea of cultural ecofeminism contend that women have a more intimate relationship with nature due to their gender roles and biology; their sensitivity about the collapse of the environment should be prized by the public since it establishes a more direct connection to the natural world with which humans must coexist (Miles).

In animation produced by Ghibli, the concept of ecofeminism is more likely to be the cultural one, for female roles in stories aims to keep the environment from being

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ruined; they also believe in sacred natural God and legends relate to nature and consider connections between nature and human to be essential. In addition, most of heroes from movies like Hollywood or MCU save the world by killing or eliminating dangerous animals or creatures in order to make the world be safe. In contrast, heroines in Ghibli keep the world in a more ideal and peaceful way with making both creatures and human live in harmony together owing to nature worship.

2.2. Contrast of Relationship and Romance between Disney Princess and Ghibli one

Women in many Ghibli animations are independent and powerful since Hayao Miyazaki tries to portray women in different way in his works. According to “Great Geek Debates: Disney Princesses vs. Hayao Miyazaki,” in every film from the Disney princess industrial complex, romance is based upon the laws of attraction, or honestly, based upon sexuality. In Disney, a princess’s beauty and attraction make a man be a better person who is powerful enough to fight against their antagonist; and the story always ends up with a man and a princess living happily forever.

However, Erik Weeks indicates that relationship certainly plays a small part of Ghibli, and this is only component of relationship in the story. In some films, attraction even plays nothing as forming a romantic story, thus, this enables Hayao Miyazaki to be a flexible storyteller. Moreover, the relationships between romantic leads are created by forces other than just physical attraction, and friendship is always a component behind the relationships. People can easily figure out this idea from the three pieces of story which are going to be discussed.

2.3. Essential characteristics contributes to strong heroines

In “The 6 Defining Characteristics of Strong Female Protagonists,” Amanda Patterson mentions six significant elements help building up female protagonist. Firstly, female role should have a goal to accomplish in the story; there will be severe outcome

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if her story goal is not accomplished. Second, the female role is imperfect; since she is flawed, she has to make decisions and afford the consequence of the decision and her imperfection may reverse the story. Third, the female role captures audience attention; she might have characteristics differ from others, and the features she has make audience easily tell her from normal figures. Next, she changes over the course of the story; in comparison with princess from cartoons animated by Disney, female role changes along with the story plots instead of changing a lot in a flash overnight. Fifth, the female role does not exist as a support for another character; instead, she exists and requires for other people's help. During the process pursuing the peaceful or ideal world, the antagonist is there to show how weak or strong she is. The last one, the female role has the ability to stand up to the antagonist; it does not mean she has to kill or defeat the antagonist; the female role may change her antagonist over during the process. In Ghibli animation, female roles are strong enough to prove the power of mighty love or mother nature, they also take advantages of their methods to stand up for the opposite roles in a mild way.

3. Discussion

3.1. Ecofeminism: The connection between the nature and females

In the beginning of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, Nausicaä flies her glider in the Toxic Jungle. She finds out the shell of a giant mutant insect and lied on the shell, watching the spores falling slowly. Spores in Toxic Jungle are viewed as dangerous things since they emissions poison materials; thus, villagers always burn them down to keep themselves safe. However, Nausicaä does not afraid of them, instead, she considers spores as beautiful creatures in Toxic Jungle, this represents her love toward nature. After that, she rescues Master Yupa from the angry giant mutant insect and instructs the insect to go back to Toxic Jungle with flash grenade and a duct flute. By using only two tools to smooth over the anger of the giant mutant insect implies

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Nausicaä is familiar with the insects and there is invisible connection between the natural environment and her.

According to Savior, not only does Nausicaä not understand nature as an enemy, she grasps that it is benevolent even in its ferocity, working to purify what human beings have polluted. The small artificial Toxic Jungle in the basement of Nausicaä's room makes her realize pure water and clean lands not only benefitted Toxic Jungle but help it to filter polluted materials produced by human. However, Nausicaä is the only person who finds out the truth that Toxic Jungle is helping human beings and it is human beings that keep ruining the environment and even thinking of burning the jungle down. The understanding indicates Nausicaä's consideration and carefulness toward Toxic Jungle, which further emphasizes her connection with environment.

In addition, in comparison with Princess Kushana, who aims to gather different countries to ruin Toxic Jungle with horrible Giant Warriors, Nausicaä tends to maintain the harmony between Human and Toxic Jungle and protects the insects in order to create an ideal world. Although Kushana is also the princess of Tolmekian, people can easily tell her from princess Nausicaä according to the way she rules the empire. In the film, Kushana actually cares about men under her commands, but she is at the same time a harsh and district leader. Being afraid of being killed by her brother for her throne, she eagers to conquer every emperor by using Giant Warriors to massacre huge insects even though she has to neglects lives of villagers of Valley of the wind and creatures of Toxic Jungle. However, this contrasts quite markedly with what Nausicaä does. In the end of the film, she sacrificed herself to soothe over furious giant mutant insects and protects the Valley of the Wind from being attacked. However, giant mutant insects stop moving forward to the valley and extended their feelers to heal Nausicaä. The idea of ecofeminism is rising to prominence when Nausicaä completed such a mission impossible via her sacrifice.

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Apart from *Nausicaä of the Valley of Wind*, *Princess Mononoke* is also a household animation known for its concept of ecofeminism. San, the daughter of the God Moronokimi, hates human, for she is abandoned by her parents. She aims to kill Lady Eboshi, her main antagonist, for she deprives the habitats of creatures in the forests and take over the forests for its natural resources. Though San is a human, she understands what animals say. San is eager for a clean and harmony forests without any human; however, Lady Eboshi builds the Irontown and ruins the mountains and trees, which anger the God of mountain. According to Sierra, while the film has often been praised for its strong female characters and its positive environmental message, an ecofeminist reading shows us how *Princess Mononoke* problematically recreates some troubling archetypes related to women and their connection with nature. Lady Eboshi's ambition to exploit natural resources magnifies the connection between San and the environment, showing her mind to protect the forests.

When Okkoto-nushi is injured after attacking human, San insists to accompany him to prevent him from turning into a demon though this may make her be cursed. San chases after Okkoto-nushi and convinces him to calm down. In the end, Okkoto-nushi eventually becomes the demon and grabs San tightly, however, San does not give him up and tries her best to awake him. People can clearly see how San cares about the forests and creatures in it, instead of escaping from difficulties, she attempts to rescue others no matter how dangerous it will be.

3.2. Rejection and Romance: Women and men could be friends

In the beginning of *Kiki's Delivery Service*, when Kiki arrives at the town closed to the ocean, she is stopped by a policeman since she almost causes a car accident due to her immature flying skills. Afterwards, Tombo, the male role shows up and helps Kiki to get rid of the trouble; after that, he follows Kiki and hits on her. However, Kiki refuses to talk to Tombo, for she thinks Tombo is impolite. In modern society, people

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usually hear the statement,” Girls should learn how to say no to others.” Kiki is actually the typical example of one of the “Girls” in the statement. Even when they run into each other on the road, Kiki rejects to talk to Tombo. Despite of the fact that she just moves to the city and has no friends at all, she still insists to follow through her own principles. Nevertheless, the master of the bakery in which Kiki is living arranges them to meet up each other via the delivery service. Tombo displays the flying-bicycle to Kiki and gives her a ride. The bicycle ends up turning into pieces of elements after the accident, but having said that, the meeting turns Tombo and Kiki into friends. Moreover, Kiki does not hate Tombo after chatting with him. Recently, comments like “There is no purely platonic relationship between a man and a woman,” are common on the Internet. However, relationship between Tombo and Kiki overthrows the idea obviously.

Apart from Kiki, San and Ashitaka in *Princess Mononoke* do not develop a further relationship in the end of the story. Ashitaka seems to be in love with San at the first sight at the river shore. When saving San from falling into the trap settled by Lady Eboshi in the Iromtwon, Ashitaka gets injured. San scolds at Ashitaka and threatens to kill him immediately. Nevertheless, right before Ashitaka faints owing to the serious wound, he abruptly compliments, “You are beautiful.” People can see how astonished San is because of the statement. After that, San tries to heal Ashitaka’s wound by feeding him the chewed herbal medicine. Afterwards, the war between militaries led by Lady Eboshi and wild boars is launched. The wild boar side fails in the war and this turns Okkoto-nushi into a demon which jeopardizes San’s life and makes San shout out Ashitaka’s name. This represents the importance of Ashitaka in San’s mind and her assistance of Ashitaka’s help. However, it seems that San already falls in love with Ashitaka when he considers a rude, wild and wolf-like girl to be a beauty. In the end of the story, Ashitaka asks San to leave the forests with him, San refused him immediately and suggested them live separately in the forests and the village though. San and

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Ashitaka do not develop further relationship although they encounter many difficulties and fall in love with each other; otherwise, they are still friends. San understands she is the human but still insists to live in the forests. In spite of the fact that San and Ashitaka save the forests together, she will not accept human at all. In comparison with normal animations, this is a special ending which the female role insists on her point of view and skips the plot living happily forever with the male role.

3.3. Not All Boys are Heroes: The Mutual Arrangement in the Films

In some typical fairytales, men are depicted with mighty images and hero-like description; women are cowardice and weak, waiting for men's help. People usually portray men as powerful figures, with their outstanding physical abilities and courage, they used to become the one arranged to reverse the dangerous situation in stories. Nevertheless, Kiki overthrows the stereotypes. Soon after Kiki loses her ability to fly, the flying boat is out of control. Watching the emergency news on the TV, Kiki borrows a broom brush from a stranger on the street and tries to fly into the air. At the moment when Tombo is too exhausting to tightly grab the rope connecting him with the boat, Kiki catches him with the flying broom brush. Instead of being rescued, the female character rescues the male one in the story.

Moreover, according to Feminism and Studio Ghibli, it is a very mutual arrangement, where women and men repeatedly help and save each other. However, in animations produced by Ghibli Studio, it is difficult to tell from the setting of the heroes in the stories, for men and women take turns to save each other; thus, it is also convincing to say “men” are not heroes in the stories. Take *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* for example, in order to take back Giant Warrior rubbed by Tolmekian troops, Aspel, the Prince of Pejite, rides a fighter aircraft to attack Kushana's. Intending to protect people in the airplane, Nausicaä aims to stop Aspel from his behavior. During the process, Aspel falls into Toxic Jungle and angers creatures in it. Thought Aspel

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shoots down most of the plants and kills lots of insects in the jungle, selfless Nausicaä rescues his life with her glider. Soon after that, Aspel helps Nausicaä to escape from Pejite's airplane to save innocent villagers of the Valley of the Wind. Instead of a hero and a coward waiting for the redeemer, Nausicaä and Aspel takes turns to help each other and realize the dream of an ideal world. This definitely topples some traditional ideas that men are always hero. Actually, there is no need to emphasize one's heroic features by another's weakness; the way Hayao Miyazaki portrays both of them reaches the goal of what feminism required for, "the real equality between different genders".

In addition, there is also no particular heroic figures in *Princess Mononoke*. At the second time when Ashitaka meets San, she furiously intrudes the Irontown since she wants to kill Lady Eboshi. However, Ashitaka notices the opportunity is actually a trap settled by Lady Eboshi. Ashitaka then knocks San off in order to come her down and take her leave out of the town. Regardless of villagers' opposition, Ashitaka leaves with San and gets injured by one of the villagers. Soon after that when San wakes up, she chews the herbal medicines for Ashitaka and heals him. People can barely recognize who the real hero is here, for San and Ashitaka take turns to save each other, and both what they do represent important parts in the story. Furthermore, in the end of the story, Jiko-Bo, the hidden antagonist in the film cuts the head of Forest Spirit down and angers the God of the forests. At that time when San is devastated, Ashitaka cheers her up and eventually return the head of the Forest Spirit in the end of the film. They chase up Jiko-Bo, hold the head and return it to the Forest Spirit together. At the end of the story, San and Ashitaka save the Forest Spirit together without any particular stereotypes toward heroic characteristics; they are both heroes.

On the whole, Hayao Miyazaki enables people to figure out feminist ideas from different perspectives and themes. Apart from the above three works, women usually play important role in secretly helping and devoting to men's success. For instance, in

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Howl's Moving Castle, though Susan does not directly save anyone, she plays an important role in changing over other figures in the entire course. In addition, in *Porco Rosso*; thanks to Gina and Fio, Porco successfully defeats Curtis in the end. It is Hayao Miyazaki's unique way of storytelling that enables people to continuously savor the meaningfulness of feminism in the future.



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