

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Comic has been widely popular amongst children in all around the world. According to Merriam-Webster, comic book is a a magazine containing sequences of comic strips —usually hyphenated in attributive use. Comic book has been a media of entertainment not only for the children, but for some adults too, in which they are still enjoying themselves to read comic. The reason why adults are still reading comics are varied, some of them found their quality time while reading comic, some of them found out that comic actually holds important life lessons that we might have never been taught in life, and some still reads comic because it bring back their childhood memories. For children, they love to read comic because of the visual imagination that the comic's offer: from the characters shape, the colorfulness, or the fun they found in the story.

Comics are generally made for a purpose of pure entertainment. The easy access of the comic, either being accessed from internet or its availability at the book store, makes comic as a pleasuring entertainment that everyone could enjoy anytime. However, despite its purpose to entertain everyone, it doesn't mean that every comic is purely for entertainment. Some comics were made as a critic to the society, and usually the creator would use the characters as the media to depict a form of critic to the public. Moreover,

comic books that were authored by U.S. government agencies could serve as a tool to inform, persuade, and encourage new behaviors in readers.

Avatar: The Last Airbender – The Promise is a three parts comics written by Gene Luen Yang in 2012. The comic serves as a continuation of the Avatar: The Last Airbender that was aired in television from 2005 until 2008. Avatar The Last Airbender – The Promise focus on Aang's journey a year after he became an Avatar, a title given to a person who are destined since the day he was born to maintain the harmony of the world's four nations by having a special ability to bend these four elements: Earth, Water, Wind, and Fire. The story tells the struggle of Aang and his friends (including Zuko that now becomes the new Fire Lord), to restore the peace by trying to remove Fire Nation Colony in Earth Kingdom named Yu Dao. Aang promised to fulfill the peace by making a program named "Harmony Restoration Movement". (Yang, Gene Luen. 2012. Avatar: The Last Airbender – The Promise Trilogy).

However, Aang and Zuko are faced in conflict. The movement plans to take the people in the Fire Nation colonies and move them into the Fire Nation itself. However, an unexpected controversy breaks out, as the older colonies are composed of people who have never lived within the Fire Nation and have intermarried with Earth Kingdom citizens. These people view the movement as robbing them of their homes. Fire Lord Zuko is caught between the desires of his people and the demands of many who believe peace and balance is only attainable if Fire Nation citizens return to their country. When the Earth Kingdom army arrives to enforce the Restoration Movement, Zuko deploys

his own forces in defense of the colonies, leading to an explosive showdown between the recently belligerent sides and threatening to reignite the fires of war. Aang must decide whether to follow through on his promise, and decide the fate of the colonies in the process.

The appearance of several female characters such as Katara from the water tribe, in which she was depicted as the only remaining member of female water tribe in her village, shows a how a woman could give a huge impact for her surroundings.

In the comic, Katara's still become tough as she was be in the cartoon. She became Aang's girlfriend and be with him through the entire storyline, giving Aang's advice and even help him during a fight. Also, the female warriors of Kyoshi, in which it was depicted that they are dressing in a full make-up and women dress, using fan as their weapons, shows their excellence in martial arts and eventually became Zuko's bodyguards after the previous male guards was proven incompetent to protect the Fire Lord. Their reputation was gained after they first gave Sokka's one important lesson in the cartoon because Sokka was known to be sexist and underestimate their abilities in fighting. Toph, the blind earthbender. shows us that despite her disabilities, she could mastered the earthbending perfectly and became Aang's teacher to mastered his earthbending skills in the cartoon. Later in the comic, she created her own Metalbending school and plays major role in the story. And then there are also several female characters that contributes in their society such as Kori, Smellerbee, and a bunch of females that declared themselves as "Avatar Fan Club".

These female characters shows us how the comic actually holds many essential life lessons, in this case, it shows us how gender roles are depicted through the female characters. Avatar comic is not only entertaining to read, but on the other hand, it has lessons about how female could play important roles in the society.

Studies regarding Avatar: The Last Airbender has been conducted by several researchers. One of them were a study that focuses on the storyline of Avatar: The Last Airbender cartoon. The author discuss about how Avatar cartoon contain issues and lessons that could be an effective moral educator for children who watched it. Avatar's representation of racial diversity is particularly unique for a children's show (perhaps even for television in general), and its nuanced portrayal of male and female characters provides a positive example for its viewers (Poizner, Dara. 2017. Avatar: The Last Airbender as a Moral Educator).

Another research focus on Avatar: The Last Airbender live-action version that was heavily criticized during its release. The author focus on this research is to identify how whitewashing is practiced and how this movie is then considered to whitewash its casts. According from the article, the practice of whitewashing in Hollywood has started as far as the early 1900s when white actors portrayed black characters by coloring their face black to resemble the characters. From the study, the writer finds, in accordance to the whitewashing theory, that whitewashing is practiced in the movie by Caucasian actors who play the roles of non-white characters and also by atrocious and

insignificant characters that are played by non-white actors. (Rahma Nirmala, G. A. 2018. Whitewashing: A Study On The Last Airbender Movie).

If the previous studies focused on both cartoon and the live-action version of Avatar: The Last Airbender, this study will take the comic version of Avatar: The Last Airbender as the main source of the research. The comic version itself serves as the continuation of the cartoon series. Whereas, research regarding this comics are still limited to accessed due to its released that only came in a comic book. This study would be focusing on how each female characters involved in the comic shows their existence and contribution within the society, giving a proof that the roles of female characters are exist among the male characters.

1.2 Research Question

How are gender roles portrayed through the characterisation of female characters as depicted in Avatar comics?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The study is aimed to reveal the portrayal of gender roles through female characterisation as depicted in Avatar Comics.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to broaden reader's knowledge regarding portrayal of gender roles in a comic book. This study is also expected to be used as sources for other researchers who are conducting similar studies in the future.

