

The Interrelations of Nature and Woman in Takahata's *The Tale of The Princess Kaguya*: An Ecofeminist Perspective

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Abstract

Nature, as an essential part of human life, should be preserved to maintain a good quality of life for living beings, and literature can be a tool to promote this issue. This article aims at (1) exploring the characters in Isao Takahata's The Tale of the Princess Kaguya and (2) analyzing the interrelations of woman and nature as parallel in a patriarchal society. In discussing the movie, this article employs the ecofeminist approach. Five theories are applied to support the analysis: the theory of characterization and Mise en Scène, the theory of ecofeminism, the theory of symbolism, and the theory of patriarchy. The Tale of the Princess Kaguya reveals the equation of women and nature and how both are devalued. The analysis of the characters reveals that Princess Kaguya possesses caring, adventurous, and mysterious characteristics, while Sanuki no Miyatsuko possesses caring, loving, ambitious, and arrogant characteristics. The analysis also finds that Princess Kaguya loves to play with nature. She is equated to an animal, such as a bird, and a plant which is a tree branch. Women and nature are seen as parallel in the story. On the other hand, the noblemen in the story, as the masculine, are ignorant of nature as they pluck flowers and destroy a swallow's nest. This study finds out that Princess Kaguya experiences oppression as she is forced into a lifestyle she does not wish for and is harassed by an Emperor.

Keywords: ecofeminism; patriarchal society; nature; Princes Kaguya

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Introduction

The mistreatment of nature may lead to environmental degradation that certain countries or regions may experience. In 1977, the United Nations Conference discussed the issues of land degradation, where half of the

world's land seemed to be categorized as 'dryland' (Meadows and Hoffman, 2002). Furthermore, commodity production has encroached on pastoralists' traditionally used

territory in the Sahel, gradually driving them into smaller areas (Suhrike, 1994).

In literature, the issues of nature have already been seen in even one of the earliest types of art that humans have ever produced and used, which is oral literature. (Sone E. M., 2014). Oral literature that includes folktale, myth, folk drama and legend is passed down or restricted to the so-called folk or is conveyed orally (Goody. J., 2017). Swazi oral literature, for instance, offers textual sites that represent various interactions between human beings, other living beings, and the environment.

In the development, combined with other issues, such as feminism, tales imprinted in people's minds are adapted into other literary forms, including movies. Some examples of adaptation movies are *Pom Poko* (1994) which brings the issue of nature; *Kuroneko* (1968), which is adapted from a supernatural folktale in Japan; and *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya* (2013), which presents the issues of nature and feminism.

A study of the interrelation between women and nature is conducted by Putri and Retnaningdyah (2021), using the Disney movie *Frozen II* as the object of the study. Under the ecofeminist approach, this study explores "the environmental issues, the patriarchal system that lead to natural destruction, and the role of women to repair the existing natural destruction" (p. 133). One interesting conclusion is that female characters in the movie have the feminine values to overcome the mistreatment of nature caused by the masculine.

Analyzing *Princess Mononoke* movie from the viewpoint of a Western audience, Sierra et al. (2015) see that as distant from a standard Western cartoon as one can get, the movie *Princess Mononoke* has a fantasy tale with talking animals, a charming young hero, and a princess. The women in the movie show the connections between gender, nature, and technology. "Princess Mononoke addresses an increasingly important topic, the impact of human intervention and technology on the world we all share, in a complex and nuanced way" (p. 53). Japanese anime, too, often more narratively complex than their Western counterparts, frequently tackle issues regarding the intersections between

humanity, nature, and technology (Sierra et al., (2015, p. 54).

Hasija (2017) observes that in *Maleficent*, the countryside automatically associates itself with the feminine. In the movie, for instance, Maleficent heals a broken tree branch with magical power in one scene. "She watches over the forest like a lioness protecting her cubs; she knows them all by their name" (p. 88). On the other hand, the Moors represent a natural, conventional feminine space. Positive characteristics such as trust, kindness, and reciprocity are attributed to the creatures of the Moors throughout the film.

In Euro-western worldviews, women and nature are philosophically and symbolically linked. Ecofeminists assert the belief that a world separated in a hierarchical and dualistic manner was created in Euro-western cultures, and in dualistic conceptual systems, men are associated with masculinity, the mind, heaven, the supernatural, and disembodied spirit, whereas women are associated with femininity, the body, sexuality, earth or nature, and materialism (Eaton & Lorentzen, 2003).

The idea that women are often linked to nature in Western ideology, is the sole reason for this study to include the Western ideology viewpoint in discussing the interrelation of women and nature. Ecofeminists also discuss how nature is often related to women.

Nature has been represented as a woman in two rather differing senses: 'she' is identified with the body of laws, principles and processes that is the object of scientific scrutiny and experimentation. But 'she' is also nature conceived as spatial territory, as the land or earth which is tamed and tilled in agriculture (Soper, 2000, p. 141).

Thus, the theory of ecofeminism is required for this research to explore and discover how the object, *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya*, shows the interrelation between women and nature in the movie, how they are positioned as equal or parallel in a patriarchal society that sees them as feminine and inferior. As mentioned by Warren (1997), when women are seen as closer to nature, it brings them to an inferior position where their freedom is being challenged. Plumwood

(1993) also supports the idea as he argues that women and nature, as well as nature as feminine, may disadvantage women, nature, and the quality of human life. Therefore, this research also discusses how women and nature are both oppressed in a patriarchal society due to being perceived as inferior and feminine.

The above ecofeminist studies on movies, and the insights about ecofeminism, trigger this article to examine further issues of ecofeminism, using Isao Takahata's *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya*. In particular, this article aims at studying the following points: (1) the characterization in Isao Takahata's *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya* characters; and (2) the interrelations of woman and nature as parallel in a patriarchal society in Isao Takahata's *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya*?

Methodology

The object of this study is an animated movie entitled *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya*, directed by Isao Takahata and released in 2013. According to Boggs and Petrie (2008), a movie communicates verbally through conversation and visual action, where their intricate rhythms are similar to those of music and poetry. A movie also compresses or expands time and space, moving freely back and forth within its expansive boundaries, much like the novel does (Boggs and Petrie, 2008).

The Tale of the Princess Kaguya, is adapted from a Japanese folktale. *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya*, also known as *The Tale of the Bamboo-Cutter*, was first narrated in The Heian period (795-1185) and has been adapted and reinvented numerous times (Japan House Los Angeles, 2021, para. 1).

It is a story of a woman named Princess Kaguya who came out of a bamboo tree and was found by a bamboo cutter who then raised her with his wife as their child. It is finally revealed that Princess Kaguya actually came from the moon. Throughout her life on earth, Princess Kaguya experiences a lot of happiness and suffering before she finally returns to the moon after experiencing mistreatment from the masculine on earth that causes her to

scream inside her heart, wanting to leave the earth.

In studying this movie, this article employs an ecofeminist approach. According to Gaard (1993), ecofeminism emerged from various feminist activities and research areas, including the anti-nuclear, anti-labor, pro-health, women's, and animal liberation movements. This approach seeks to find equal efforts to end oppression between women and nature. Plumwood (1993) states that

women's inclusion in the sphere of nature has been a major tool in their oppression emerges clearly from a glance at traditional sources: 'woman is a violent and uncontrolled animal' (Cato the Elder) (p. 19).

This study also applies several theories as the base for the analysis. They are the theory of characterization and symbolism by Boggs and Petrie (2008), the theory of Mise en Scène by Pramaggiore and Wallis (2008), and the theory of ecofeminism by Gaard (1993), and the theory of Patriarchy by Walby.

Results and Discussion

The Characterization of Princess Kaguya

The movie's main character, Princess Kaguya is presented as a beautiful woman born from a bamboo sprout. Unlike other human children, Princess Kaguya grows faster than them. She has beautiful long black hair, clean white skin, and a beautiful face. She turns out to be sent from the moon to live on earth.

Besides having an attractive physical appearance, Princess Kaguya is described as a person who consistently demonstrates how she cares about nature and is helpful to people. These caring characteristics are shown through her external actions. The following pictures show how she cares and is helpful to others.

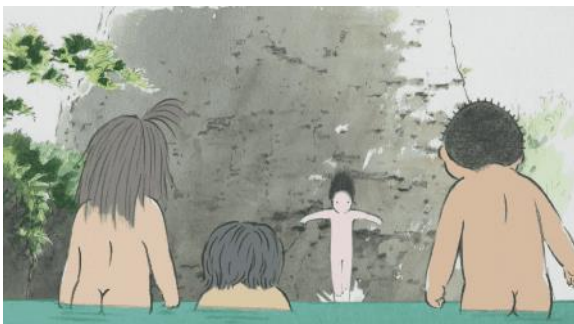


Pic 1. Princess Kaguya helps her father



Pic 2, Princess Kaguya bandages Sutehmaru

Princess Kaguya is portrayed as having a great adventurous soul for nature. Since she was a child, she has enjoyed running in the rain. She, too, enjoys playing and swimming in the water, even jumping from a high cliff into the water. She said to her father, "I was born to truly live! Just like the birds and the beasts" (Takahata, 2013).



Pic 3. Princess Kaguya jumps from a high cliff into the water

The Characterization of Sanuki no Miyatsuko

Sanuki no Miyatsuko, Princess Kaguya's father, who believes that she was born to be a princess on earth, tries to create a situation where Princess Kaguya can grow up as a princess. It can be seen through the dialogue in which Sanuki no Miyatsuko talks to his wife

about moving from the mountain to the capital so that Princess Kaguya can experience life with the nobles. "Living with nobles as a real princess, she'll be happy" (Takahata, 2013).

Sanuki no Miyatsuko develops to be an ambitious and arrogant person after living in the capital city. He and his wife start to wear clothing usually worn by the upper class in the capital. Along with these qualities, Sanuki develops his arrogance, as revealed in the following conversation:

PRINCESS KAGUYA. So can we invite my friends? I miss them so much!

PRINCESS KAGUYA MOTHER'S. That might be nice!

SANUKI. Don't be a fool! Do you realize how important this is? We live in a different world from those bumpkins!

(Takahata, 2013)

As the movie gets to the point where Sanuki no Miyatsuko wants to raise Princess Kaguya as an actual princess, it is revealed that Sanuki no Miyatsuko has unconsciously forced Princess Kaguya into a life she doesn't want to live, as he becomes more and more ambitious in living a higher class life.

SANUKI. His Majesty summons you to serve him at court! You'll be one of his ladies. And I'll wear a courtier's cap! Thanks be to Heaven!

PRINCESS KAGUYA'S MOTHER. You still don't understand how she feels?

SANUKI. It's you who doesn't understand! This is what I've worked for!

(Takahata, 2013)

Unlike Sanuki, who is excited because the Emperor wants Princess Kaguya to be his wife, Princess Kaguya does not consider the news exciting as she does not want to marry the Emperor. When hearing about it, Sanuki no Miyatsuko becomes shocked and reveals that this is what he has been waiting for, showing ambitiousness.

The Interrelation of Woman and Nature in a Patriarchal Society

Special Bond between Woman and Nature

Men and women react to environmental challenges differently, with women being more in tune with the natural world (Eaton and Lorentzen, 2003). The special bond between women and nature is represented by Princess Kaguya as the woman, and the living and non-living things (animals and plants) represent nature. As mentioned by Eaton and Lorentzen (2003), "Some see women as "closer" to nature/earth than men and possessing innate traits of caring, community building, nonviolence, and Earth sensitivity" (p. 3).

Takahata shows the closeness and the special bond between Princess Kaguya and nature from the movie's beginning. Princess Kaguya is known to be born from a bamboo sprout, which is part of nature. Bamboo shoots in Japanese culture are often referred to as the symbols of prosperity and vitality (Closs, 2022, para. 12). Princess Kaguya, born from a bamboo shoot, is thought of as good luck and a charm of blessing by Sanuki no Miyatsuko who found her. Later, Sanuki no Miyatsuko uses the existence of Princess Kaguya to bring prosperity and prestige to his life. The fact that the story starts with the connection between woman and nature emphasizes the special bond between nature and woman in the story.

When Princess Kaguya was a baby and learned how to crawl, she saw two frogs jumping from place to place in her house. Not being scared or trying to avoid the frogs, Princess Kaguya even chose to play with them instead. This fact reveals how Princess Kaguya has had a special bond with nature since she was a baby.

The special bond between Princess Kaguya and nature is also emphasized when she sneaks into the bushes while crawling, and then she takes a peek from the bushes only to see a lot of baby wild boars. Without fear, she goes to them and happily plays with the wild boars. According to Nic (2017, para 3), "wild boars are respected and even feared in Japan because of their courage and tendency to charge and attack.



Pic 4. Princess Kaguya plays with frogs.



Pic 5. Princess Kaguya plays with wild boars.

Wild boar is the symbol of fertility and prosperity. (Nick, 2017, para. 3). How the wild baby boars in the story react to Princess Kaguya shows no aggressiveness to attack her, implying that the wild baby boars feel a special bond with Princess Kaguya. In addition, Princess Kaguya was born as a bamboo shoot which is the symbol of prosperity in Japan. Not only does Princess Kaguya feel close to nature, but nature also recognizes and welcomes Princess Kaguya warmly.

The movie's setting also says a lot about this bond. As Pramaggiore and Wallis put it, "the primary functions of the setting are to establish time and place, to introduce ideas and themes, and to create mood" (2008, p. 92). In the beginning, Princess Kaguya lives in the mountain, surrounded by trees, flowers, grass, birds, and other plants or animals. When later her father takes her to live in the city, she makes a garden to fulfil her longingness for nature. However, this made-up garden differs from the natural garden she used to live in. The following picture (Pic 6) says it all.



Pic 6. Princess Kaguya in her "fake" barren garden.

Princess Kaguya looks sad in the garden, and the barren nature (tree) shows the same mood. Not only Princess Kaguya feels close to nature, but nature also feels close to her. It is visually symbolized by the fact that almost all the leaves on the tree are gone, leaving only the branches and a few leaves.

Princess Kaguya's releasing animals (birds and grasshoppers) back into nature can be seen as symbolizing a woman-nature solid bond. In addition, birds and grasshoppers symbolize the freedom that Princess Kaguya is looking for.



Pic 7. Princess Kaguya releases a bird to fly freely into the sky.



Pic 8. Princess Kaguya releases a grasshopper to go free in nature.

Woman and Nature as Equals

A woman is often naturalized, and nature is often feminized. The idea that nature is feminine is seemingly cross-cultural and nearly universal due to the relationship between women's reproductive functions and nature (Soper, 1995). And as mentioned by Eaton and Lorentzen (2003), endangering nature is equivalent to endangering women. Women are perceived as more in tune with nature.

Born from the bamboo sprout, Princess Kaguya is different from the other kids as she grows visibly fast. This confuses her friends, who are boys from the village. In Japanese culture, the bamboo shoot is perceived as the symbol of prosperity and vitality (Closs, 2022, para. 12). The boys equate Princess Kaguya with a bamboo shoot, as seen in the following dialogue:

*FRIEND 1. She's growing fast!
FRIEND 2. Like a bamboo shoot!
FRIEND 3. That's her! Li'l Bamboo!*
(Takahata, 2013)

The same attitude is also revealed by Prince Kuramochi, a nobleman who tries to win her heart. The metaphors he uses to describe her are all natural.

PRINCE KURAMOCHI. If I came to pass that you became my wife, my joy would be as if I had found a jeweled branch from a tree of Mount Penglai in China with silver roots, a gold trunk, and pearls for fruits (Takahata, 2013).

Another nobleman, Isonokami, emphasizes this equation when he compares Princess Kaguya to a part of nature, a cowrie shell.

ISONOKAMI. No! To me, Princess Kaguya is like the cowrie shell that swallow warms as a treasure and a charm for a safe birth.
(Takahata, 2013)

The dialogues convey that men (represented by Prince Kuramochi and Isonokami) see Princess Kaguya and nature as parallel.

Ignorance of Nature by the Men in a Patriarchal Society

Women seemed more at the mercy of their biological fate than men; they were trapped in domestic and corporeal immanence and could only achieve freedom by rejecting and transcending their woman-hood (Simone de Beauvoir as cited in Eaton and Lorentzen, 2003). Things related to women, such as emotion, animals, the natural world, and the body, are valued less, while things related to men, reason, humans, culture, and the mind are valued more (Gaard, 1993). *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya* reveals how women are taught to possess those traits.

Princess Kaguya experiences some oppression. For example, she is expected to fulfill her role as a woman and a princess. She is expected to act both like a woman and a real princess by her father. Her father even brings Lady Sagami from the palace to teach Princess Kaguya. Having no choice, Princess Kaguya allows Lady Sagami's teachings and instructions even though she does not enjoy them. Princess Kaguya has to learn how to write, play the koto, act as a noble, become polite and put on make-up.

The portrayal of Princess Kaguya in the movie shows how women and nature (which are equals) are valued less in society. Women are oppressed by men, just as nature is ignored. Historically, in the Heian period, it was common for daughters to marry into other families to confirm relationships between two clans. Arranged marriage was normal then because they valued their clans' names and reputations. As a result, education in early Japan focused on preparing women for marriage (Edubirdie, 2022, para. 5).

In the movie, Princess Kaguya is, forced to wear make-up even though she does not want to. She is even forced to pluck her eyebrows and blacken her teeth. Her arguments that plucking eyebrows may cause sweat to reach her eyes and that black teeth would look ugly when she laughs are ignored. She is even told that a princess may not open her mouth when she laughs.



Pic 9. Princess Kaguya cries when her eyebrows are plucked.

More obvious oppression is done on Princess Kaguya when she grows up. Her father keeps hiding her from other people because she is a princess. Her father forces her to live in a mansion, although she loves to live in the mountain. In a patriarchal Japanese culture, women don't even have their own lives; instead, they are supposed to care for everyone and be moral, quiet, polite, and submissive (Edubirdie, 2022).

The equalization of women to nature has led to the devaluation of women and their exclusion from cultural life. It has also contributed to the devaluation of nature by making it appear more feminine (Soper, 1995). This is observed in the movie when Princess Kaguya's admirers present her plucked flowers to show their admiration. This act exemplifies men's acts of ignorance toward nature.

Another example of ignorance towards nature is when Prince Kuramochi brings Princess Kaguya the branch he snapped off. The act of snapping off the branch from a tree by the men reveals ignorance toward nature, as the branch is part of nature and should be able to grow in its environment.

The ignorance also comes out of their idea of equating a woman with nature. As stated, the noblemen who equate Princess Kaguya to a cowrie shell and jeweled tree branch, for example, make efforts to win her heart into marrying them by giving Princess Kaguya what they equate her to. The nobleman tries to catch her attention even though it means snapping off the branch tree and plucking flowers, which reveals how the masculine in the patriarchal society plays a part in the ignorance and persecution of nature.



Pic 10. Princess Kaguya cries, receiving plucked flowers from her admirers.

Oppression of Women by the Masculine in a Patriarchal Society

Women seemed more at the mercy of their biological fate than males; they were trapped in domestic and corporeal immanence and could only achieve freedom by rejecting and transcending their woman-hood (Simone de Beauvoir as cited in Eaton and Lorentzen, 2003). Because of the way that women and nature have historically been conceptualized in the Western intellectual tradition, things that are related to women, emotion, animals, the natural world, and the body are valued less. In contrast, things related to men, reason, humans, culture, and the mind are valued more (Gaard, 1993).

Princess Kaguya's life shows how society values women and nature less. Not only that, but men also mistreat women. Sanuki no Miyatsuko, without listening to Princess Kaguya's opinion and decision, tells her enthusiastically that the Emperor wishes to marry her, so she needs to get ready for her wedding and that both of them will need a bed chamber. Sanuki clearly mistreats a woman.

The Emperor demonstrates another instance of a man's mistreatment toward a woman. Almost at the movie's end, the Emperor, whom Princess Kaguya already rejects, thinks she wishes him to come directly to her. The Emperor thinks that she plays hard to get. During the scene, the Emperor hugs Princess Kaguya from behind without permission, indicating harassment toward her. It is clear, however, that the Emperor thinks that he may do as he wishes and that Princess Kaguya must follow his wishes since he is an emperor. This scene explicitly shows his dominance and that he feels superior to her.

THE EMPEROR. Come with me to the palace
PRINCESS KAGUYA. Why are you doing this?
THE EMPEROR. No woman is unhappy when I do this.

PRINCESS KAGUYA. I will never be yours!

THE EMPEROR. You must be if I wish it.

(Takahata, 2013).

Conclusion

The Tale of the Princess Kaguya takes time in the Heian era when patriarchy was still strongly dominant. Women were far from being equal to men. In light of the ecofeminist approach, this article particularly examines the relationship between women and nature and how this relation existed in society as something commonly accepted. Throughout Japan's history, marriage has been used to ensure the continuation of bloodlines, form political alliances, and increase a family's Wealth (Villa, 2019). Education for women, therefore, also focused on preparing them for marriage.

The story reveals the experience of patriarchy that happens to Princess Kaguya. As a woman, Princess Kaguya experiences an arranged marriage set by her father, Sanuki no Miyatsuko. She also receives pressure from her father and society that demands her to act like a princess so that noblemen would want to marry her. Sanuki no Miyatsuko hopes to marry Princess Kaguya to a higher-hierarchy man to raise his family's dignity.

Princess Kaguya comes from the moon to live on earth, so the story goes. She possesses caring characteristics, as observed in what she does to humans and her natural environment. Her father, although he cares for and loves Princess Kaguya possesses ambitious and arrogant characteristics.

After analyzing the interrelation between woman and nature, it is observed that Princess Kaguya is portrayed as closer to nature than man. In the patriarchal society, there is a special bond between women and nature, and the patriarchal system creates this situation to a certain extent. Women are equated to nature, and men tend to devalue both.

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