

## “Everything Everywhere All at Once” Through Mulvey’s Feminist Perspective

Chen Lei, Dr. Mustaffa Halabi Azahari

City Graduate School, City University Malaysia

Corresponding Author Email: 81203540@qq.com

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### Abstract

This paper employs Laura Mulvey's feminist theory to analyze the feminist elements in the Hollywood Kung Fu film "Everything Everywhere All at Once." Utilizing semi-structured interviews and narrative analysis, it reveals how the film's female characters demonstrate strength and independence. This reflects changes in female self-identity in modern society and challenges traditional gender norms. The research finds that the film's gender depiction aligns with feminist film theory, indicating Hollywood's acceptance of a feminist perspective. This marks progress in both gender portrayal and cultural cognition. Finally, the research emphasizes the need for future studies to explore the intersection of multiculturalism and gender perspectives in Hollywood films to further develop feminist film theory.

**Keywords:** Virtual Reality, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Dong Nationality, Unreal Engine

### Introduction

With the increasing frequency of cultural exchanges, feminism has become more prominent in the film industry, including works by female directors and mainstream Hollywood films. For example, “Little Women” showcases various types of feminism such as liberalism and Marxism, emphasizing women’s independence, choice, and the complexity of social roles. Mulvey’s theory is often applied to deeply explore the psychological development and socio-cultural identities of female characters in films. This theory integrates pre-Oedipal theory and contemporary feminist thought, revealing the dialectical relationship between cultural fantasies and reality. Mulvey’s work in the 1980s on gender diversity and affect theory provides a unique analytical framework. This paper analyzes the female characters and their narrative representations in the film “Everything Everywhere All at Once” from Mulvey’s perspective, exploring the feminist elements in the film and explaining how the female characters challenge traditional gender norms.

Additionally, this paper examines the evolution of female roles in Hollywood films, with a particular focus on the transformations during the 1980s and their feminist interpretations. It explores how gender representations in "Everything Everywhere All at Once" reflect or

diverge from Laura Mulvey's theory of the "male gaze." By delving into the film "Everything Everywhere All at Once" and its position within feminist narratives, this study aims to reveal new perspectives on gender issues in Hollywood martial arts movies in light of Mulvey's theory. Overall, the paper seeks to demonstrate the evolution of feminist elements in Hollywood martial arts films through the analysis of "Everything Everywhere All at Once," showcasing the new analytical framework provided by Mulvey's theory. These findings have implications for current film production and audience reception, as well as their broader cultural significance.

This study innovatively combines Mulvey's feminist theory with the analysis of the Hollywood martial arts film "Everything Everywhere All at Once," exploring the interaction between gender representation and cross-cultural narrative. Firstly, "Everything Everywhere All at Once" is not only a visually and narratively innovative work but also a film that deeply explores issues of identity and gender. By applying Mulvey's theory, this study reveals how the film uses visual pleasure and narrative strategies to challenge traditional gender stereotypes and reconstruct female identity (Mulvey, 1975). Secondly, as a cross-cultural film, "Everything Everywhere All at Once" integrates elements of both Eastern and Western cultures, providing a rich and novel perspective for research due to its unique cultural background and narrative style. Through an in-depth analysis of this film, the study not only expands the application scope of Mulvey's theory but also offers new frameworks and methods for understanding gender issues in cross-cultural cinema. Moreover, the findings of this study will help film scholars, producers, and audiences better understand and utilize feminist theory, enhancing their multi-layered comprehension and appreciation of film art and social culture (Smith, 2012).

### **Literature Review**

This study, starting from Laura Mulvey's feminist perspective, examines "Everything Everywhere All at Once," exploring the transformation and reshaping of gender dynamics in similar movies. Historically, such films typically reinforced stereotypical gender roles, limiting female characters to objectified portrayals. Recent trends show a more nuanced and empowering depiction of female characters, reflecting a broad shift in societal gender perceptions. This evolution aligns with Mulvey's feminist criticism of films, challenging and redefining the traditional male gaze. Studies by Velija (2013); Alsarve & Tjønnedal (2020) emphasize the increase in empowerment and complexity of female roles in martial arts movies, indicating a departure from traditional gender narratives.

Laura Mulvey's feminist perspective began in the 1970s, with her proposing the "male gaze" theory, emphasizing women in films as visual objects for male viewers, revealing gender inequality in media. According to Mulvey (2001), her theory evolved significantly, profoundly impacting the film industry and feminist theory. Helford (2006); Sassatelli (2011) note that Mulvey's views have been continuously expanded and reshaped to adapt to sociocultural changes and women's new roles in film production and criticism. Mulvey's theory emphasizes a deep and diverse interpretation of female roles, reflecting societal concerns about gender equality and women's rights. The development of this theory highlights the agency of women in visual culture and the importance of the feminist perspective in understanding and reshaping gender dynamics.

Laura Mulvey's feminist theory remains widely influential in academia and continues to develop across various fields. For instance, (Barrowman, 2023) thoroughly analyzed feminist pedagogy in Hollywood films and the impact of Mulvey's "male gaze" theory. Gill & Baker (2021) used Mulvey's theory to analyze the evolution of nursing profession images, demonstrating its impact on social and psychological fields. McGoe (2020) re-examined Mulvey's psychoanalytic film theory, exploring its effect on modern film audience experiences. These studies indicate that Mulvey's feminist theory not only continues to play a vital role in the field of film but also stimulates deep thinking and discussion in a wide range of academic areas.

Laura Mulvey's "male gaze" theory offers a critical perspective for analyzing "Everything Everywhere All at Once." Mulvey noted that film often portrays female characters as visual objects for male viewers, a concept reflected in the character design and narrative of this movie. Her theory allows for an analysis of gender roles in the film, examining whether women are depicted as active agents and how gender roles are visually expressed. The theory's emphasis on cinematography's role in shaping the "male gaze" is crucial in analyzing the film's visual style.



Figure 1: Poster of the movie "Everything Everywhere All at Once," sourced from the internet: <https://www.ebay.com.my/itm/265639607631>

Additionally, Mulvey encourages examining the narrative structure and power dynamics in films, focusing on how gender roles display or challenge traditional gender power structures. This approach, applied to "Everything Everywhere All at Once," reveals gender biases and stereotypes, enhancing understanding of its cultural and social context. This analysis method is applicable to other films and media, aiding in a deeper comprehension of gender dynamics in modern media.

### **Research Gaps**

In recent years, Hollywood martial arts films have gained widespread attention and recognition globally. "Everything Everywhere All at Once," as a martial arts film that integrates elements of both Eastern and Western cultures, has achieved great success in terms of visual effects and narrative techniques. It has also sparked profound discussions on cultural and social levels. Although existing studies have analyzed martial arts films from aesthetic and cultural perspectives, research exploring their gender representations and narrative strategies from the perspective of Mulvey's feminist theory remains insufficient. Mulvey's theory primarily focuses on the portrayal of women in films and issues of the male gaze, and its application in cross-cultural films has not been fully explored (Mulvey, 1975).

There are theoretical gaps and demographic gaps in research in this field.

This field exhibits both theoretical and demographic gaps in research. The theoretical gaps are primarily evident in the application of Laura Mulvey's theory to non-Western cultures and within the genre of action films. Mulvey's feminist theory is predominantly tailored to the Western film industry, and its applicability and limitations in analyzing martial arts films that blend Eastern and Western elements have not been thoroughly explored. Martial arts films are often regarded primarily as showcases of action and martial prowess, with less emphasis on gender issues. Mulvey's theory, which is typically applied to analyze female representations and male gaze issues in traditional Hollywood cinema, is underexplored in martial arts films, particularly in how gender issues are integrated and presented in cross-cultural Hollywood productions. Additionally, the unique gender representations in action movies, such as the display of physical strength and the depiction of combat scenes, lack a robust analytical framework within existing feminist theories.

The demographic gaps are primarily evident in the diversity of audience groups. There is a lack of research assessing the impact of Mulvey's theory on actual film-watching experiences, and insufficient studies on the gender awareness and film reception among different social, economic, and cultural audience groups, especially in terms of how these factors influence film acceptance and interpretation across genders. Studying audience reactions to "Everything Everywhere All at Once" could provide new perspectives and data to support or challenge existing theories.

The concept of the "male gaze," wherein women are often portrayed as objects of visual pleasure for male viewers in films, can be utilized to analyze gender representations and narrative structures in cinema. By identifying and addressing these research gaps, the project not only aims to deepen the understanding and application of Mulvey's theory but also to comprehensively assess the challenges and applications of Mulvey's feminist theory in modern cross-cultural cinema, fostering broader reflections on gender expression and narratives within Hollywood and the global film industry.

This study systematically analyzes the narrative strategies and gender representations in the Hollywood martial arts film "Everything Everywhere All at Once" by applying Mulvey's feminist theory. It aims to reveal how the film challenges traditional gender stereotypes and reconstructs female identity through character development, plot arrangement, and visual presentation. Firstly, this study will fill the gap in the application of Mulvey's theory to cross-cultural martial arts films, providing new theoretical frameworks and analytical methods.

Secondly, through a case study of "Everything Everywhere All at Once," this research will demonstrate how cinematic art reflects and influences the audience's perception of gender identity in a cross-cultural context, revealing the role of film as a cultural product in constructing social gender identity (Smith, 2012). Lastly, the findings of this study will not only deepen the academic understanding of the narrative functions and gender representations in martial arts films but also offer new perspectives for filmmakers and audiences. This will help them better understand and apply feminist theory, enhancing the artistic expression and social impact of cross-cultural films. Therefore, an in-depth study of how "Everything Everywhere All at Once" reflects and reconstructs gender identity through narrative techniques and visual representation will expand the application of feminist film theory and enrich the understanding of gender issues in cross-cultural cinema.

### **Data Collection and Methodology**

This study employs a combination of feminist theory and film analysis, primarily utilizing a case study approach. This method not only reveals the gender dynamics present within films but also assesses the applicability and limitations of feminist theory in modern film criticism. All essential information required for the research is meticulously obtained through the examination of existing documents. These documents include film footage and behind-the-scenes visuals of "Everything Everywhere All at Once," video interviews with the creative team, textual film scripts, written records of interviews with the creative team, and theoretical writings by Laura Mulvey. Additionally, reviews, film critiques, and scholarly articles related to the film are collected to gauge public and critical perspectives. Visits to the production notes and interviews with directors and actors are conducted to grasp the underlying thoughts and intentions behind the creation.

Data analysis is primarily conducted through observational methods and documentary research applied to online data. The film "Everything Everywhere All at Once" undergoes a systematic content analysis using observational techniques, focusing on the portrayal of gender roles, interactions between characters, and choices of camera angles to determine if these elements reflect the "male gaze." Regarding documentary research, on one hand, Mulvey's theoretical writings and their interpretative materials are read and organized to deepen understanding of her feminist perspective and explore the application of Mulvey's theory in film analysis, especially how other scholars have applied this theory in analyzing Hollywood films. On the other hand, key dialogues, plot developments, and character setups within the film are analyzed to assess whether female roles serve merely as visual elements or contribute more deeply to character development and narrative progression.

When employing content analysis, the film text is coded and categorized according to a pre-established codebook, which includes categories such as gender representation, visual presentation, and character development. Qualitative analysis software (such as NVivo or Atlas.ti) is utilized to manage and analyze data, identifying frequently occurring themes and patterns, and performing statistical analyses, such as frequency analysis, to quantify gender biases in character portrayals. The findings from these research tools will be used to comprehensively analyze the feminist elements in the film and how these elements reflect Mulvey's theoretical perspectives. This method is crucial for helping researchers accurately understand gender issues in films and can serve as a reference for potential research in the

field of feminist film studies. Without a comprehensive review of relevant literature, an in-depth exploration of feminist theory and practice in films would not be possible.

To obtain all the necessary information for the study, various methods are employed for a comprehensive, detailed, and complete analysis. The choice of these methods aims to ensure accurate and reliable information. Therefore, researchers will describe in detail the various stages of the research method, including the analysis of film content, review of related literature, and application of feminist theory. In-depth exploration of each key scene and character in the film is essential for producing a comprehensive study that can serve as a reference for all researchers and film enthusiasts. Using qualitative research methods, all obtained information is meticulously collected and analyzed based on research objectives. Moreover, all information is closely related to the feminist issues presented in the film. Through this in-depth analysis, the research aims to explore the gender dynamics displayed in the film and how they align with Mulvey's feminist theory.

### **Findings**

In the film "Everything Everywhere All at Once," the portrayal of female characters demonstrates the evolution of gender roles in Hollywood movies. Compared to past gender stereotypes, the female characters in this film display more layers and depth. This change reflects Hollywood's growing sensitivity and adaptation to gender issues, as well as the societal evolution in the perception of gender roles. The female characters in the film are no longer confined to traditional passive or subsidiary roles but are presented as more independent and powerful individuals. This aligns with the research by Dowd et al (2021), who noted the evolution and transformation of gender roles in Hollywood films.

Moreover, the strength and independence exhibited by the female characters in the film mirror the changes in women's self-identity in modern society. In the movie, female characters show physical strength as well as psychological and emotional independence and complexity. This portrayal breaks away from the singularity and marginality of female characters in traditional films, reflecting the growing autonomy and diversity of women in modern society. This resonates with the research by Li Dandan (2006), who pointed out the changes in women's self-identity in modern society and their representation in films and other media. This part of the research highlights the emerging characteristics of female characters in "Everything Everywhere All at Once," emphasizing the evolution of Hollywood films in gender representation and a profound understanding of modern female roles.

### **Research Findings**

The study reveals that the female characters in the film exhibit strength and independence, reflecting changes in women's self-identity in modern society and challenging traditional gender norms and the male gaze in cinema. Mulvey posits that women in films are often portrayed as passive objects of the gaze, while male viewers are granted active and dominant perspectives. This study finds that "Everything Everywhere All at Once" breaks away from these traditional gender role stereotypes to a certain extent.

The film's female protagonist is not only a highly skilled martial artist but also the driving force of the story. She does not rely on male characters and independently accomplishes the mission of saving the world, subverting the conventional narrative of male heroism in

traditional kung fu movies. The study points out that the "female gaze" in Mulvey's theory is reinterpreted in this film, with the protagonist using her own strength and wisdom to invert the traditional "male gaze." This forces the audience to re-evaluate the role and influence of female characters in action films. In "Everything Everywhere All at Once," the portrayal of female characters demonstrates the evolution of gender roles in Hollywood movies. Compared to past gender stereotypes, the female characters in this film display more layers and depth. This change reflects Hollywood's growing sensitivity and adaptation to gender issues, as well as the societal evolution in the perception of gender roles. The female characters in the film are no longer confined to traditional passive or subsidiary roles but are presented as more independent and powerful individuals. This aligns with the research by Dowd et al (2021), who noted the evolution and transformation of gender roles in Hollywood films.

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This part of the research findings highlights the emerging characteristics of female characters in the film "Everything Everywhere All at Once," emphasizing the evolution of gender representation in Hollywood films and a profound understanding of modern female roles.

Furthermore, the film's visual style and narrative techniques resonate with Mulvey's viewpoints. By employing a non-linear narrative structure and complex visual scenes, the film disrupts audience expectations, forcing them to understand and appreciate the complexity and depth of female characters from different perspectives. The study points out that this innovation in narrative and visual style challenges the traditional film viewing experience and redefines gender roles.

Mulvey's theory focuses on how films shape female images through the "male gaze," positioning women as passive objects of viewership. This perspective provides an essential theoretical framework for analyzing gender dynamics in Hollywood films.

Firstly, Mulvey points out that traditional film narratives often revolve around male characters, with female characters being marginalized and primarily serving as visual decoration or catalysts for male character development. However, in "Everything Everywhere All at Once," the protagonist's characterization and development break this pattern. She demonstrates independence both physically and emotionally, and she drives the central conflict and resolution of the film, challenging Mulvey's discussion of gender and power. Through innovative narrative and visual techniques, the film offers a new viewing perspective, enabling audiences to see and understand the story from a female viewpoint. This approach not only alters audience perceptions of female characters in films but also promotes diversity

and equality in gender roles. This aligns with Smelik's (2019) assertion that feminist film theory plays a crucial role in redefining the relationship between audiences and films.

Secondly, by applying Mulvey's theory, researchers can observe how the film attempts to transform the traditional "male gaze" through complex narrative structures and profound character development. The female protagonist, with her intricate background and motivations, challenges traditional expectations of female characters. Her portrayal goes beyond mere displays of physical strength, delving into psychological and emotional depth, which helps reshape audience perceptions of female roles in action films.

Moreover, Mulvey's feminism also addresses how media create and sustain gender differences. In "Everything Everywhere All at Once," the directors utilize non-traditional editing and cinematographic techniques to disrupt audience expectations and viewing habits. This innovation is not only a departure from traditional film language but also a challenge to fixed gender role patterns. Such visual and narrative innovations make the film a powerful tool for exploring and critiquing gender stereotypes.

Finally, Mulvey's theory provides a critical lens through which we can identify and analyze gender politics in films. "Everything Everywhere All at Once," as a film that combines Hollywood production techniques with Eastern martial arts elements, offers audiences a new perspective to reconsider and evaluate traditional gender roles. This theoretical discussion broadens the application scope of Mulvey's feminist theory and fosters a deeper understanding and critique of gender expression in Hollywood films.

Furthermore, the film's portrayal of female characters resonates with feminist critical discourse. By highlighting the strength, independence, and complexity of female characters, the film reflects universal issues of gender equality and women's empowerment. This aligns with Lazar's (2007) research, which suggests that feminist critical discourse analysis is a powerful tool for understanding and interpreting gender dynamics, particularly in exploring the cultural and social impacts on female roles.

This theoretical discussion aims to delve into the significance of female character representations in "Everything Everywhere All at Once" and how these representations connect with feminist film theory and critical discourse.

## **Conclusion**

The film "Everything Everywhere All at Once" provides a new way to understand and appreciate Hollywood martial arts films through its unique feminist perspective. This not only expands the application scope of Mulvey's feminist theory but also opens up new perspectives and possibilities for gender studies in film art. This study reveals the feminist elements in the Hollywood martial arts film "Everything Everywhere All at Once," particularly through an analysis from Mulvey's perspective. The paper presents a comprehensive and critical viewpoint, offering valuable contributions to existing film theory and gender studies.

Furthermore, this research emphasizes the importance of diverse female characters and female perspectives in film narratives, promoting a deeper understanding of the roles of women in film production and audience reception. The changes in gender representation and



cultural cognition in the film not only serve as practical applications of feminist film theory but also challenge and expand modern social and cultural concepts.

Finally, this study focuses on the intersectionality of multicultural and gender perspectives in Hollywood films, exploring the representation of female characters from different cultural backgrounds and how these representations influence the perceptions and acceptance of global film audiences. Such research can further enrich and develop feminist film theory, providing more comprehensive and in-depth analysis of gender issues for the film industry and its audiences.

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