Research on the Variations of Female Characters in Disney Movies

—Taking the Seven Dwarfs and Moana as Examples

Ziyan Wang[1,a,*]

[1]*Shanghai QibaoDwight High School, Shanghai, 201101, China*
a. wangziyan979@gmail.com
corresponding author

Abstract: Disney is one of the most famous film companies in the world, and its Disney Princess series is also one of the most popular movies for women and children. The characteristics and personalities of the princesses influence people's ideas. However, with the passage of time, the image of women in Disney movies has also undergone great changes. In this regard, based on Disney's first princess movie Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and the last officially certified princess movie Moana, this paper makes a case analysis and comparison of female characters in these two movies. Through the method of literature analysis, it can be concluded that with the development of feminism, Disney's portrayal of female characters has changed from a single, weak and innocent flat image at the beginning to a diversified and independent image of the brave in the modern era.

Keywords: Disney princesses, female character, movies

1.   Introduction

As one of the most famous animated film companies in the world, Disney's famous Disney Princess series is deeply rooted in people's hearts. The resulting image of the princess has influenced generations around the world. In this study, a comparative analysis is made on the transformation of Disney's female character image from the beginning to the present by taking *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and Moana* as cases. Female characters have changed over time in the Disney Princess line [1]. The biggest audiences of these series of films are children and women, reflecting the female images and social concepts of different periods at that time, and also influencing the development of feminism in different era. Therefore, this paper focuses on the variations of female characters in disney movies. This study is helpful to promote the development and thinking of feminism.

2.   Character Analysis of Disney's Early Princess Series -- Take Snow White and the *Seven Dwarfs* as an Example

Snow White and the *Seven Dwarfs* was Disney's first princess film, born in 1937 at the dawn of the first feminist wave [2]. The story centers on Snow White, who is constantly being pursued by the evil Queen (Francesca, Snow White's stepmother) because she is jealous of her beauty.

2.1. Female Role Images

Snow White is the first princess in the Disney Princess series, and it is also a princess role that fully demonstrates the beauty and tenderness of the mainstream female image in society at that time and needs protection. For her image, the most prominent feature of the film at the beginning is "beauty", which is in line with the single aesthetic image of women in society at that time. Her skin was like snow, her hair like ebony, and her lips like roses. Her name, "Snow White," also highlights her fair appearance. The second characteristic of Snow White is weakness and pity. Due to birth reasons, she had to wash and cook as a princess, and was killed by her stepmother because of her superior appearance. The film fully demonstrates her helpless and pitiful image. That is to say, the princess in the early Disney movies is a woman who needs to be protected and cannot survive alone.

2.2. Relationships Between Female Characters

The Evil Queen, Snow White's stepmother, is the biggest villain in the film. As the only two female characters, she and Snow White fully demonstrate the female relationship under the male context in the social concept at that time. The Evil Queen has a great hatred and evil for Snow White because of her beauty. Hunting Snow White for the title of "the world's most beautiful". First of all, the generation of this hatred shows the extreme pursuit and harshness of society toward women's appearance at that time. Secondly, the relationship between women is shown as a competitive one. The two are in opposition. It can be seen that under the prejudice of patriarchal society, the relationship between women and women should be full of malice.

2.3. The Female Image Shown in the Plot

By cooking and cleaning for the men, Snow White seems to be content with her lifestyle as she waits for her prince to take her to his castle [3]. Snow White is mostly saved in the movie. Because of the shaping of her innocent and kind character, she expressed that women could not survive independently in the outside world under the concept of the male gaze in society at that time, and needed to live under the protection of men. Through the film, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Snow White is faced with multiple instances of danger [3]. Snow White depends on the seven Dwarfs and the prince to survive. Snow White has to clean the homes of seven men and cannot go out alone. He accepted gifts from strangers three times without their permission and almost lost his life. From getting lost in the woods at the beginning to eating a poisoned apple at the end, the plot is constantly saved by the seven dwarfs and the prince. At the same time, Disney set that she must get Prince Charming's true love kiss to recover her health. The perfect ending for Snow White is to marry a handsome and powerful prince and be handed over from one umbrella to another. This "dodder flower" like plot shows that women are fragile objects in the eyes of men, and men are powerful heroic images.

3. Character Analysis of Disney's Current Princess Films -- Take *Moana* as an Example

Moana, released by Disney in 2016, mainly tells the story of the Polynesian princess Moana, a descendant of a sailing family, who embarks on a voyage alone in order to find a mysterious island in the legend. The influence of the third wave of feminism can still be seen in this film.

3.1. Female Role Image

Moana is Disney's latest princess character this year. The 16-year-old's image and the previous princess image have a great gap, with strong personal characteristics. In terms of appearance, Disney no longer pursues a weak and white image but chooses to create a look that contains a diverse aesthetic. Moana has long, curly, even frizzy hair like seaweed, and her skin is a wheaty color from life near

the sea. These characteristics show her very lively personal characteristics, giving the audience a strong sense of vitality. In the same vein, Disney did not always pursue perfection when shaping, and her nose was even a little flat. This also highlights the independent and distinct image of a princess.

3.2. The Relationship Between Female Characters

Moana has obvious features of ecofeminism [4]. As can be seen from the villain female characters Evil Ka and the goddess Tefiti, Disney emphasizes the harmonious relationship between nature and women, rather than the antagonistic relationship between women and women. The evil card appears as the image of the evil woman. In fact, the identity of the mother of the island - the goddess Tefiti is the embodiment of nature. The villain here is richly represented by two seemingly diametrically opposed characters with "two faces" - the goddess Tefiti and Villka. There are two completely opposite faces in the existence of one ontology. Evil Ka and Tefiti both represent nature and are endowed with female gender, respectively representing evil and good, nature's revenge and friendship, the resistance to female oppression and the harmonious coexistence of male and female equality.

3.3. The Female Image Shown in the Plot

Moana took risks and had a powerful inner symbol to save Maui and the goddess. As a strong and brave princess, she is no longer a marginal position that needs to be protected in traditional society, but she collapses the image of male discourse power and dominance advocated in traditional society. In the plot, as a child, Moana is always protected by her family, preventing her from venturing out on her own. But she broke through those shackles by showing her own sense of independent adventure. In the main storyline, she has always been the dominant character, even if one person will find a way to solve problems and express a strong female independence. In the plot, she helps Maui become a partner instead of being rescued for romantic love. In the plot, Moana becomes the subject, driving all the development and power.

4. Comparitive Analysis

The princess image in the Disney series has also undergone great differences and changes from the end to the present. It can be seen that the princesses' thoughts are also transformed from the old female inherent ideas into the new female ideas. The princesses from the first era encapsulate submissiveness, traditional female gender roles, and stereotypical beauty [5]. The beauty and weakness of Snow White have been molded into a female image that fully conforms to the traditional male concept. She reflected what an early 20th century housewife in America was supposed to act. The worth as a princess was based off of her appearance and singing abilities [2]. The third wave of feminism led to even more freedom for women and the most gender equality in America yet [6]. In *Moana*, the audience can see more culture and a more diversified aesthetic system. The image of the princess ranges from the traditional red lips and white skin, to the image of a strong personal style.

The relationship between women and women also shows the concept of women in different societies. It can be seen from the contradiction between the evil queen and Snow Gong Zhi that the character image is flat and contains strong prejudice and a narrow vision. The relationship between women and women presents a separate and opposite situation. In *Moana*, the relationship between women and others becomes grand and full. Even the image of the evil woman has become full. The current situation and thoughts of women's existence are clearly displayed between women and other roles, rather than intensifying the opposition and mutual examination within the female group.

In the plot, Snow White and Moana occupy completely different or even opposite positions. Snow White is the object that needs to be protected and saved by the prince and the dwarf, and she cannot

effectively protect and resist herself. On the other hand, Moana obviously possesses a sense of independence and the germination of self-consciousness. They dare to rebel, dare to fight, and dare to challenge the established system and the patriarchal system, showing the consciousness of the white master and the values of daring to fight. In short, with the increase in women's labor participation rate and income, women's consciousness has gradually awakened. Women are no longer the persecuted and protected characters like Snow White, but the strong, brave female image like Moana, who dominates her own destiny.

5.   Conclusion

In the early Disney princess animation, male characters occupied only a small part compared with female characters, but they had a huge voice and played a leading role. In the film, the princesses express their dreams of longing for love through constant singing and regard meeting the prince as the only way to change their lives and achieve happiness. Under such circumstances, male characters are the key to dominating the development of the entire film. As completely independent individuals, men are the center of power and play a controlling and leading role in the fate of women. In Disney's later film *Moana*, women not only have the right to speak but even explore and save men's right to speak, completing the transformation of the role of "savior". Women become the creators and adventurers of a happy life.

The princess images created by the Disney series of animation have changed from time to time, reflecting the unique charm of women at different times. Especially in recent years, the image of Disney princesses in the new period conforms to the connotation of the new female culture, and also conforms to its expectations for women, and provides a model for the construction of the new female culture.

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