

Research on the Creation of Female Characters in Animation from the Perspective of Gender Narrative

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Abstract: With the continuous improvement of global gender equality awareness, the application of gender narrative perspective in various cultural works has gradually received attention, especially in the popular culture form of animation. The shaping and performance of female characters has also ushered in unprecedented changes. This study aims to explore the creative evolution of female characters in animation from the perspective of gender narrative. By comparing animation works from different periods and different cultural backgrounds, this paper analyzes the changes in female characters in terms of gender, role positioning, and personality setting. At the same time, this study will also focus on the diverse shaping of female characters in contemporary animation, and how to reflect gender equality and female autonomy in plot settings, gender relations, and role interactions. Specifically, the paper conducts research from the following aspects: the typical image of female characters in traditional animation, and analyzes the commonalities behind them; secondly, explores the transformation and diversification of female character images in recent years, and how to reflect the progress of gender cognition and the changes in social values; finally, combines with specific cases, it analyzes how gender narrative affects the shaping of female characters in the process of animation creation. Through these studies, this paper hopes to reveal the importance of gender narrative in animation creation, and provide theoretical support and creative reference for more equal and diverse gender performance in future animation works.

Keywords: Gender narrative, Animation, Female character.

1. Introduction

Based on case studies, this paper describes the changes of female characters in animation and the awakening of their thoughts by studying the behaviors, movements, character designs and even clothing styles of characters in Chinese and foreign animations. Most of the audiences of animations are young people, and they will subtly influence the behaviors and thoughts of young people. Good animations can help young people establish good values and correct ideas about things, while decadent and backward animations do the opposite. The three princess images created by Disney from 1937 to 1959 mostly serve the behaviors and desires of men. The figures of the three white princesses were designed into hourglass shapes, and tight clothing that highlighted the contours of their figures became products that objectified women and served the visuals of boys [1]. Unstable democracy leads to the marginalization of women in society [2]. Many women have no say in national politics, resulting in many gender-related insecurities being ignored in public discourse [3].

In these social contexts, female characters in animation often exist as auxiliary male characters, as an existence that is not valued, or female characters are portrayed as the image of love first, and they are desperate for love. With the progress of society, the status and treatment of the female group have improved. In recent years, with the emergence of the term "female protagonist", more female participants and more positive female images have gradually appeared in animation and other film and television works. Based on the case study and critical theory of feminism in animation, through the gender performance of the characters portrayed in animation, the social and cultural background of animation, the female perspective, gendered narrative, etc., the initiative and motivation of female characters in animation in different times, spaces and ideas are compared. The study aims to explore the performance of women in animation, the social status of women reflected by female characters in animation, and the attitude of society towards women at that time. In order to achieve the purpose of promoting gender equality, exploring female perspectives and promoting critical discussions, it will trigger the audience's reflection and spread correct female ideas.

2. Analysis of Female Characters in Animation

2.1. Female Characters in Traditional Animation

Female characters in traditional animation are often given images of being virtuous, beautiful, fantasizing about love, and serving male characters at all costs for love. Female characters in Disney animations from the 1930s to the 1960s were mostly designed as weak and beautiful. In the film and television works "Snow White" and "Cinderella", they are described as having beautiful looks, jealous stepmothers, and princes who save them. Traditional The clothes of Disney female characters in animations are mostly designed as close-fitting floor-length dresses, and the characters are white and beautiful white princesses. Snow White is designed with snow-white skin and bright red lips, and her personality is kind, loving, and elegant. Cinderella is portrayed as gentle, graceful, kind, and beautiful. Her character design is also white, beautiful with golden hair, and glasses as deep blue as the ocean. In the early days, Disney creators were committed to creating a group favorite character, so that everyone except the villain queen would like the Disney protagonist. Whether it was animals, the seven dwarfs, the fairy godmother, or even the villain's helpers, they all liked the protagonist. At that time, women's desire for power was a symbol of evil, and the female villains in animations reflected the prejudice of the patriarchal society against capable women [4].

The female villains in animation are monotonous, stereotyped, ugly, vicious, and jealous. The queen in Snow White is beautiful and powerful, but still jealous of Snow White's beauty. Cinderella's stepmother and stepsister are typical villains. They have severe nasolabial folds, thin and upturned eyebrows, three white eyes, dark eye makeup, and dark red lips. Female villains before the new century had strong bodies, because in patriarchal society, strong and powerful women's bodies are associated with chaos and evil [5]. Therefore, in animation, most of them have the stereotyped characteristics of being rude and fat. In the 20th century, women were in a low position and had low social recognition. Men often entered society to support family income while women were only responsible for being mothers [6]. This is reflected in the fact that most Disney princesses do not have jobs, sing every day, have a strong affinity with animals and play with animals. They cannot save themselves from suffering and can only wait for the prince's salvation. These are the female characters in traditional animation. Due to the limitations of the times, they can only rely on others, do everything for love, and emphasize that love is supreme.

Since feminism was established after the first industrial revolution, with the development of culture and economy, the status of women at that time was improved, and the image of princesses in subsequent Disney animations has changed. They are no longer pale and beautiful, but have a relatively healthy skin color, and are endowed with strong and brave personalities. However, there

are still limitations for female characters. They always revolve around love, which is mostly reflected in the characters' dedication to men and their courage to pursue love. Losing oneself and blindly pursuing love was also a stereotype of women at that time. Since women had no say, these stereotypes were praised and followed at that time.

2.2. Female Characters in Modern Animation

Perfect image characters Women only belong to the family and men, not to society [7]. Different from traditional animation, modern animation characters have diversified settings. They are no longer a single perfect goddess image. They are no longer fixed with slender figures and S-shaped curves, but more with independent personality and courage. They may have various shortcomings and deficiencies in the animation and continue to improve, grow and enhance themselves in the animation. For example, Princess Elsa in *Frozen*, who is an anti-traditional female character, is closed, distrustful of herself and has an escapist mentality that makes her hide in the snow-capped mountains. Later, she gradually becomes strong and confident through the warmth and help of her sister.

Female characters in modern animations emphasize the mutual help between women, rather than the female competition relationship in traditional animations. Elsa's character design does not use a tight-fitting skirt with a waist. Compared with traditional female characters such as Cinderella and Snow White, Elsa and Anna's costumes are not gorgeous, but mainly comfortable. Anna's character design is not the traditional beautiful princess image. She has a lively and cheerful personality, and warms her sister like the sun. In addition, the character setting of Merida in *Brave* is a princess with red frizzy curly hair. She is impulsive, informal, and unwilling to be bound, but also very responsible. In *Merida After* getting into trouble, she actively made amends and looked for solutions. After her mother was turned into a bear, Merida used her love and courage to help her mother Eleanor remove the curse and become human again. This animation is based on the relationship between mother and daughter, abandoning the traditional prince rescue link. It mainly revolves around the protagonist Merida and her mother Eleanor understanding each other's ideas and making progress. In modern animation, new female thinking has emerged, and with the unity, support and help between female characters, female characters take on their own responsibilities and obligations, and continue to make progress in the story. Female characters with souls have become one of the selling points for animation to attract audiences.

3. Case Sharing

3.1. Traditional Animation Case

Disney animation is a huge dream manufacturing factory. Its princess series has become a princess dream that ignores girls. In the traditional animation period, the images of Disney princesses are mostly weak dodders, relying on men to survive. Cinderella needs to wear crystal shoes and beautiful clothes to keep the prince. The little mermaid is willing to give up her voice for the prince she falls in love with at first sight; *Sleeping Beauty* and *Snow White* need the prince's kiss to wake up, and Rapunzel also needs the prince's rescue. Their existence seems to be waiting for the prince's salvation to survive, like an accessory to the prince. In China, there is also a similar animation work, *Cowherd and Weaver Girl*. At that time, the story of the *Cowherd and Weaver Girl* was a beautiful and tragic love story. Their loyal love moved many people. The magpie was moved by their love and helped them build the Magpie Bridge to help them meet. People believed that the Queen Mother and other gods in the sky were jealous of them. But the Weaver Girl's clothes were stolen, and she gave birth to a child for the Cowherd, which was no different from the traffickers who trafficked women. But at that time, people believed that the Magpie Bridge was a symbol of love and meeting. The Queen Mother was the sinner who caused them to be separated from their wives and children. From people's

perspectives and concepts today, the Cowherd and the Yellow Cattle are more like trafficking women into the mountains and forcing them to do things for themselves. Having children is a lifelong prisoner. The love story of *the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl*, which was once praised, is now criticized by many people. This is also due to the change in social concepts.

3.2. Modern Animation Cases

The development of feminism is reflected in animation, adding soul, diversity and multiple possibilities to the stereotyped setting of female characters, adapting to social development and promoting the socialization of female characters [8]. The animations "The Croods" and "Spirited Away" are typical modern animation cases. In the animation "The Croods", the second female Xiaoxiao and the heroine Xiaoyi appreciate each other and take care of each other, perfectly avoiding the traditional two women fighting for one man. When Xiaoxiao's parents want to match the male protagonist Gai and Xiaoxiao, and when Gai dislikes Xiaoyi for being a primitive man, Xiaoxiao admires and respects Xiaoyi's scars very much, and thinks Xiaoyi is very brave and cool. In this animation, each character has his own soul and unique personality. They are not overly dependent on the male protagonist, but support each other and complement each other. Every female character in the animation has made a great contribution at the end of the world. They are not doddies, and are very different from the weak female characters in traditional animation. Xiaoxiao is not as strong and explosive as Xiaoyi, so she is relatively close to the weak female characters in traditional animation. She has a thin body and is prone to allergies, but she pursues adventure and has a strong core and wisdom. Xiaoxiao's character is set to be optimistic and kind. She is always sincere and always keeps a pure heart. She believes that kindness and friendship can overcome everything. Mr. Hayao Miyazaki's animation has the most perfect romantic ideal similar to literature. Although the themes of his animations are different, most of them integrate messages such as life, survival, environmental protection, dreams, and peace that resonate and reflect [9]. Chihiro is a 10-year-old child. She is not designed with an outstanding appearance, but with an ordinary child image. However, she plays the role of a savior goddess in the animation. Chihiro is given the duties and abilities of a god. She does not have the lively and romantic personality of a child. The design of Chihiro is to let more children see their own shadows in her and resonate with her. The Zeniba in the animation is also a typical female villain character design, with an ugly appearance, dark eye shadow, a fat body and a mole between her eyebrows. The excessive ugliness of the villain character also reflects the low social status of Japanese women at that time. There are many housewives in Japan, which makes them have no financial income and low voice in the family.

3.3. Factors that Create Differences

Modern society is still dominated by patriarchal views, and gender bias lurks in any industry. Even if there is no explicit patriarchal view, gender bias in society and the workplace has not improved [10]. The status of women created by society is reflected in animation. When feminism was not well known to the public, the female characters in animation were stereotyped. The protagonists were generally beautiful, elegant, and docile wives with outstanding figures and looks. The act of "saving the prostitute" is very popular both at home and abroad. The protagonist's misery or abuse by the stepmother is one of the elements that attracts attention, sympathy and pity, while the traditional villain is a bad woman. Their character design is very simple, and they are bad for the sake of being bad. Therefore, the female villains in animation at that time tended to be women with strong bodies and rights who were not recognized in the era of male dominance. With the progress of society and the development of the times, the status and power of women have been prompted, and the female characters in animation have also begun to change. The audience of animation has changed. Female

characters in animation have begun to become brave and independent, but because the status of women is not equal to that of men, female animation characters in that era are still in the setting of longing for love and marriage. With the 21st century today, when women in many countries can take charge of their own affairs and bear family expenses and responsibilities, female characters in animation have appeared in scenes of mutual help, mutual understanding and trust, unity and friendship with other female characters, removing the female competition scenes that women do not like in today's society, and instead taking the mother-daughter relationship and sister relationship as the tone of animation, removing the limitation that the princess can only wait for the prince to save her, and beginning to appear diversified female characters.

4. Conclusion

As a medium that combines vision and narrative, animation not only has entertainment functions, but also bears the responsibility of cultural and social communication. With the changes of the times, the creation of female characters in animation has gradually broken the traditional gender stereotypes and begun to show more diverse and complex female images. These images are not limited to traditional housewives, love objects or supporting roles, but cover a variety of identities and roles, such as leaders, warriors, scientists, etc., reflecting the gradual popularization of the concept of gender equality. In modern animation, female characters are no longer just appendages or foils of male characters, but gradually become independent and complex individuals. From personality and motivation to behavioral decision-making, the shaping of female characters tends to be multidimensional. For example, by showing the growth process, conflicts and self-exploration of female characters, animation works can present the complexity and diversity of female characters as independent individuals. This transformation helps the audience to have a more diverse and inclusive understanding of gender. This study shows that gender relations in animation have gradually shifted from the traditional male-dominated, female-supporting model to more gender equality and role complementarity. In some modern animation works, the relationship between male and female characters is more equal, and cooperation and mutual assistance have become an important driving force for the development of the story. This narrative structure not only enriches the level of the plot, but also enhances the audience's recognition of gender equality. This study hopes to promote gender equality and changes in social cognition, and to provide inspiration and suggestions for future animation creators in character design.

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