

The Awakening and Development of Feminism in Disney's Typical Princess Films

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Abstract: This paper takes Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, The Little Mermaid, and Frozen, three representative Disney princess films, as reference samples to analyze the changes in the image of women in these films. Through plot development and exploration of the relationship between the main characters and the supporting characters, it analyzes the continuous awakening of women's consciousness in this film series. The image of the princess gradually shifts from a "perfect" woman who is dependent on men to an independent personality who is both rebellious and exploratory, and finally becomes a true self who is brave enough to speak out. At the same time, the transformation of the relationship between the protagonist and the supporting characters also shows the transformation of the protagonist's image and the awakening of female consciousness. However, while analyzing the significance of the interaction between feminism and the princess film series, this paper notes the limitations of the new princess films that may not have realized the awakening of self-awareness, and provides directions for the subsequent development of the film series.

Keywords: Disney, Feminism, Snow White, The Little Mermaid, Frozen

1. Introduction

Disney movies have been developed for more than 80 years, among which the princess series has created an endless number of female images. So far 15 princesses have been certified by Disney, which are widely sought after and welcomed by audiences at home and abroad. With the increasing status of women and the awakening of women's consciousness, the image of princesses has been greatly changed from their external appearance to their internal character. A review of previous studies shows that they mostly focus on the evolution of feminism in Disney films from a macro perspective. However, this paper will take Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, The Little Mermaid, and Frozen as three films with their own characteristics of the times, analyze and compare them in depth, extract the characteristics and significance of the development of feminism, and examine their existing limitations and possible future directions of development from a contemporary perspective.

The purpose of this paper, in the context of the times, is to examine the awakening and development of feminism in three aspects: the transformation of the image of the princess, the exploration of the relationship between the protagonist and the supporting characters, and the meaning and limitations of the evolution of the image.

2. The Transformation of the Image of Princess Under the Influence of Three Waves of Feminism

2.1. The "Perfect" Female Image Attached to Men

In 1937, the American Disney animated film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was released. As the first full-length animated film, its classic status is self-explanatory, and the character image of Snow White also gradually penetrated into people's hearts with the popularity of the film. Looking back at this Disney classic, Snow White does not seem to be as perfect as she is remembered, and her character is a product of her time, with obvious branding of her time under the role of complex historical factors.

The image of Disney's Snow White appeared when the aftershocks of the Great Depression were still present in the United States. The movie, adapted from a fairy tale with a classic plot and happy ending, happened to ride on the coattails of the times, creating a warm and harmonious vision of life for the people and giving them the courage and confidence to continue living. This is why the movie has been so popular since its release. However, the feminist movement in the United States was only in its infancy, and women's consciousness was limited to the elite class. The majority of women were still unable to escape the deep-rooted gender discrimination. The so-called "cozy" picture of life expected by the public was that women would be good wives and housewives, gentle and virtuous, taking care of and organizing everything in the house. Thus, under both cultural and political suppression, the image of Snow White is not exempted from the commonplace, and can even be called a typical product of male-centeredness.

First of all, from the point of view of the characters' appearance, the animated movie adapted from "Snow White" in "Grimm's Fairy Tales", spared no effort to figure out and restore the original a daughter that had skin as white as snow, lips as red as blood and hair as black as ebony description [1], the image of the princess with black hair and snow skin jumped to the screen. It can be said that Snow White's beauty without aggressiveness, everywhere reveals a gentle, slim and even fragile beauty, such a delicate appearance is also catering to the aesthetic orientation of men, popular with the audience.

Look at the character, the most prominent feature of Snow White throughout the movie is naivety and kindness. Whether facing the forest animals or the seven dwarfs, or even the queen who pretended to be an old witch, she has a kind of unsuspecting kindness. She seems ready to lend a helping hand or sing, never consider the other side is false or good intentions. But it is this almost stupid naivety, so that she does not know how to save herself when danger comes. She can only be saved by the seven dwarfs, by the prince, and even by the hunter who is going to assassinate her. Such an incompetent and dependent on the male characteristic is glorified, beautified and packaged as naive, perfectly suited to the expectations of the male society for the image of women's qualities. Secondly, she is undoubtedly a virtuous and gentle woman, cleaning up rooms and cooking food, just like a "good wife" in the minds of men. There is also a detail in the film where she gently teaches the dwarves to wash their hands before meals, which is an obvious projection of her "good mother" image. Snow White has all the virtues that a stereotypical woman should have, from naivety to lack of understanding of the world, to virtuousness to decency. But smart and bold, sensible and calm, these necessary but not in line with the preconceived character traits of the male mind never appeared in her body.

Finally, back to the storyline set, throughout the film the clue is waiting for true love. Snow White sings outside the castle at the beginning, imagining meeting the prince; after escaping to the forest, she sits in the cabin and tells stories to the dwarfs, also constantly mentioning the prince and true love expectations; even before biting the poisoned apple, wishing for it, its content is also the hope to live happily with the prince. The most widely known background music of the film, "someday my prince

will come", also constantly mentions "find my love" and "we will meet We will meet" and other key words. This shows that Snow White does not have any self-awareness or the desire to achieve self-worth, she just wants to be a good wife all her life. In the face of danger or tribulation, she is always "silent", with escape or even sleep to wait for the male characters in the film of redemption.

Apparently, the film should not be misinterpreted as a total stereotype of the dregs, leaving aside its aesthetic and ecological values, which also reflects some advanced awareness of gender equality. When Snow White spends the night at the dwarfs' house, the seven dwarfs take the initiative to give her their comfortable bed, while they sleep on the floor, in the closet, and even in the hanging cauldron, which also reflects the respect for women in the humorous camera language.

2.2. The Independent Personality of Rebellion and Exploration

In the mid-20th century, with the rise of various social movements in the United States, the issue of gender discrimination was brought back to the forefront. Moreover, since World War II, the number of women moving out of the home and into the workforce has been increasing, and women's educational attainment has generally improved. Internal and external thrusts went hand in hand to revive the feminist movement, and the second wave of the feminist movement from the 1960s to the 1980s also made its debut, having a profound impact on both political and cultural life in the United States. Disney's 1989 animation "The Little Mermaid" is riding the last train of the second wave, a change in the traditional princess film style, "Andersen's Fairy Tale" in the "Daughter of the Sea" a subversive adaptation. Throughout the princess series, this film can be said to be the precursor of the awakening of feminist consciousness among them.

First of all, the feminist movement, as an important part of the civil rights movement, is also inseparably linked with racial equality. In the movie, the little mermaid with red hair already represents progress, no longer the blond Anglo-Saxon race [2]. And she shows a willingness to take risks, courageous character traits, but also subverted the traditional image of the fragile and dignified princess. As Woolf said, A great mind should be androgynous, a male mind should have a female mind, and a female mind should contain a male mind [3]. This means that the female figure should not be symbolized and defined by stereotypes as gentle and virtuous, but should be intertwined with masculinity, and no kind of character should be labeled as gender exclusive. In the film, the Little Mermaid repeatedly mentions her longing for the world above sea level and her desire for freedom, so the two worlds of the sea and the land can be understood as projections of the family and the outside world. The film does not deny the peace and tranquility of the underwater world, and the women who live under the sea, represented by the other sisters of the Little Mermaid, also have a stable life, and they are similar to most of the traditional women who run the family. But the film also spared no effort to portray the Little Mermaid's thirst for life on land. Just as the second wave of the pursuit of women have equal employment rights, emphasizing women out of the family, continue to achieve self-worth. From this perspective, the Little Mermaid's rebellion and exploration of the outside world is the awakening of women's consciousness, opening the way for the continued development of feminist consciousness in subsequent princess films.

As an important metaphor in "The Little Mermaid", "voice" also reflects the rebellion of women against the male-dominated society and their desire to master the right to be heard. Through the words of the villainous witch Ursula, the movie points out the male expectation that "a girl who talks too much is bored by a gentleman" and "a popular lady should know how to avoid conversation". That is, women need to be silent and cannot have independent will or personal opinions. But the film is an innovative adaptation of the original text "The Sea's Daughter", allowing the Little Mermaid to recover her lost voice at the critical moment of being misunderstood and to speak out boldly to resolve the misunderstanding. This is also a symbol of women gradually reclaiming the deprived right to speak out and speak up for their own interests.

It is worth mentioning that although the Little Mermaid also constantly mentions the expectation of true love, but her relationship with the prince reversed, the Little Mermaid took the initiative to save the prince in a shipwreck, which reflects the wisdom and strength of women, but also to avoid the sudden and hasty love at first sight mode. From the first acquaintance to finally falling into deep love, the whole affection process between her and the prince was adapted to be more reasonable and more fleshed out. But as a feminist precursor, this film still has many shortcomings, as Simone de Beauvoir criticized: For women, the most necessary thing is to charm a man's heart, and then the heroine who dares to take risks is also seeking this reward [4]. The Little Mermaid's desire for the so-called outside world, but also with the prince to live a happy life, her life still can not get rid of the dependence on the prince, did not achieve the true sense of independence.

2.3. The Image of the True Self That Breaks the Shackles and Speaks out

In the early 1990s, just when people thought that the feminist movement was about to disappear, the third wave came with great force. It emphasized that women's issues involved multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-valued; it advocated thinking outside the original feminist framework and called for the elimination of gender roles and prejudices in society. Disney, which follows the trend of the times, has also launched many princesses with diverse charms, the most typical of which is undoubtedly the animated movie "Frozen" produced in 2013.

The film in the character and plot settings, boldly cut off the main line of love, the main character is no longer the prince or king with absolute dominance and the princess closely attached to them.

She is no longer born perfect, but under a lot of trials and tribulations to refine herself. In the end, she grows from a princess who escapes her own power to a queen who pursues her own values. Such a complete and reasonable growth line, powerfully break the male stereotype and women's plight and shackles, giving the best solution for women to release their own energy after getting rid of dependence on men. At the same time, Disney did not give up the "love", the mother theme, across the whole series of princess movies: the method to redeem Princess Anna and restore the entire kingdom is still true love's kiss. But Disney has skillfully broadened the definition of love. Love is no longer a narrow sense of male and female love, but includes affection and nature, true love's kiss finally became the pure affection and friendship between girls. This expansion is undoubtedly in line with the diversity of values advocated by the third wave of feminism, giving more possibilities for the development of women.

Through in-depth analysis of the whole film, it is obvious that its diversified development does not lead to binary opposition. There are many contrastive images and plots in the film. First of all, there is a sharp comparison between the two heroines, Anna and Elsa. Anna is naughty, naive and brave with a little impulse and recklessness, while Elsa is more mature and stable. Her natural magic makes her accustomed to indifference and keeps her away from others. But the film has no intention of emphasizing and preferring which character, it is their complementation and integration that saves the whole kingdom. At the same time, the images of summer and winter in the film also match with the two princesses. Anna is like a warm and vigorous summer day, and Elsa is more like a dignified and calm winter wrapped in silver. Different from the traditional film, where winter is the cold and lifeless dark side, the film focuses on the high spirited interest and unique beauty of winter, which is different from the joy of summer. This is undoubtedly a masterpiece of ecological feminism and the integration of multiple values emphasized by the Third Wave. It has not only rich and abundant multiple images, but also profound and distinct ideas and cores.

3. Exploring the Relationship Between Typical Supporting and Main Characters

The popular and distinctive supporting characters in the movie "Snow White" are the seven dwarfs, who are undoubtedly imperfect compared with Snow White. In appearance, they are in stark contrast to the tall and beautiful image of Snow White. They are not handsome, and even look and dress so funny that adds a touch of comedy to the film. In personality, they are also different from Snow White's modest character, they have their own characteristics, and even flaws. Just like their funny and well-designed name: Grumpy is irritable, full of doubt and suspicion of Snow White, but in times of crisis he stand up for her without hesitation; Dopey who is clumsy and even can not talk, always make a mess of household chores, is cute and kind, however. Thus, through the polish of the seven dwarfs in the film, it is easy to see that the small defects of the dwarfs are not harmless but making them more lovable with an approachable life style. They are just like ordinary people who may not have extraordinarily appealing appearance, nor do they have perfect characteristics, but these shortcomings have become their uniqueness, making their brave and sincere character more prominent.

Instead, Snow White's flawless appearance and impeccable character are like a fake face, without a trace of life, although it looks irreproachable, but lacks the spirit and personality characteristics. From this point of view, the creators did not really from the perspective of shaping and sculpting the image of women to give Snow White's soul, but to symbolize her, becoming a stereotypical flat and lifeless "perfect women". The film is superficial in its exploration of the inner world and behavioral characteristics of female characters, and it holds Snow White up as a "goddess" to be admired, imposing the appearance and virtues that women should have in men's minds. Conversely, Snow White's stepmother is portrayed as an evil villain with only jealousy and endless desire in her heart. Such a simple dichotomy of feminine images is obviously irresponsible, and it is impossible to portray and present the characters in their entirety. On the contrary, for the seven dwarfs represented by many male supporting characters, the author took the trouble to give them different characteristics, both humorous and witty classic scenes, but also the highlight of the rescue. Essentially, in the characterization of Snow White, the division between good and evil and the consistency of the gender division between men and women are not accidental, but implicitly convey an affirmation of the male as a whole, as opposed to the "evil" element that can only be projected onto individual female characters [5]. Snow White's stepmother is stigmatized for her power, status and ambition. From this, one can observe the fear and hidden malice of men towards women in power, who should be non-threatening in their minds, or be seen as indecent or evil. At the same time the female characters, even the princess as the protagonist, are simply portrayed in obedience to stereotypical aesthetic standards, while the male supporting characters have a carefully designed sense of uniqueness

In "The Little Mermaid", the image of women appearing as supporting characters becomes richer compared to "Snow White". Both Ariel's six sisters and the witch Ursula have different degrees of contrast with Ariel, to some extent, also fleshed out the image of the protagonist.

Ariel's sister as the princess of the seabed, with a similar attractive appearance and prominent family, but with Ariel made a very different life choice. They are not as brave as Ariel, just follow the will of their father to live under the sea. They are willing to act as a foil for Ariel, in the opening of the film's, during the Kingdom Music Festival, leaving the finale position to their little sister. Such a meek image is more in line with the traditional concept of a lady's template, but with the main character Ariel has a sharp comparison. This contrast shows Ariel's character and image of being unwilling to accept the established fate, breaking the power of her father, and pursuing freedom and the love of her heart. At the same time, the gentleness of the sisters also contrasts Ariel's mischievousness and a little recklessness, making her more vivid and lovely.

It is worth mentioning that the movie "The Little Mermaid" is a drastic adaptation and deletion of the image of the sisters in "Daughters of the Sea". The first half of the original tends to be more towards the several mermaids as a whole, group portrayal, each of them had gone to the surface of the sea to explore, the second half is also a few sisters stepped forward to try to save their sister. The film is to delete these episodes, transformed into a moment of crisis, the Little Mermaid's self-help and the prince's rescue of her. Such changes are conducive to highlight the protagonist is different from other female image because of her rebellion and bravery, which makes the story clear and well-defined. But the movie deleted the plot of the female group to help each other, Ariel was eventually saved by the prince, which is slightly regrettable.

But the movie also innovatively expanded the role of the villain Ursula, the core conflict between the female villain and the protagonist is no longer jealousy, but a bold expression of the desire to control the power of the sea. Ursula's image is no longer vicious and beautiful or extremely ugly, she has a heterochromatic skin, extremely voluptuous body and octopus tentacles, which is a very innovative evil image. At the same time, she is good at seduction, after seeing through the heart of the little beauty and its contract, and even disguised as a beautiful woman, using the little mermaid's singing voice to capture the heart of the prince. Such means and Snow White in the Queen's means is obviously more intelligent. Such a villainous image to match the wisdom of the protagonist can make the wit and bravery of the protagonist more reasonable. Compared to previous films, the lack of female supporting characters or too flat villains, "The Little Mermaid" in the female supporting role is relatively successful, as if the finishing touch, although the portrayal of the fragment is not much but a sharp contrast with the protagonist, perfecting the behavior of the Little Mermaid motivation and character traits.

Finally, in the new century of princess movies, the protagonists and supporting characters in "Frozen" brought tremendous surprises to the audience. The movie is more reasonable and highly feminist in both the setting of the protagonist and the motivation of the villain's behavior.

Frozen is a progressive choice of dual heroine and dual narrative story mode, focusing on the growth of different women character. Princess Anna change from impulsive and reckless to become more responsible, while Princess Elsa also grow from the fear of her own ability to become brave to release the power. This dual-line growth narrative technique more powerfully highlights the character traits of each of the two. It also expresses that although women are not born perfect, but in the continuous growth of continuous experience, will eventually maximize their own value. The film's representation of women gradually taking control of the discourse is not a simple reversal of the original male-dominated discourse, which "could lead to another dichotomy and fall into the rut of the early patriarchal society [6]", but rather an appeal to break the rules and regulations that bind women and gain equal rights for themselves. The demand is to break down the constraints on women and gain equal rights for themselves.

The movie is also innovative to set the male character as the villain, the prince who seems handsome and perfect in the first half of the movie, has a stunning reversal in the end, revealing greed for the status of the princess. Such a villain role undoubtedly criticizes the overall image of the male affirmation, subverting the traditional image of the prince, but also has a realistic warning meaning. At the same time, the film mentions the prince's birth - the thirteenth prince of the neighboring country who is not valued. This explanation complete the characters later reversal and blackened reasons, so that the villain's behavior motivation is more persuasive. Frozen has successfully shaped many vivid and three-dimensional images of the protagonists and supporting characters, which also shows the potential of the film's sustainable development, laying the groundwork for the sequels of subsequent films.

Through the portrayal of the characters, the film strongly emphasizes the diversity of different women - they break the chains and thus release their true selves. Women are no longer subservient to

men or products of a patriarchal aesthetic, but are the masters of their own destiny. The film not only completes the redefinition of femininity, but also carries a new awareness of women's right to speak.

4. The Significance and Limitations of the Evolution of Princess Movies

4.1. An Important Carrier of Feminist Development

As one of the important mediums for spreading American culture, Disney animated films always focus on the needs of the audience and follow the trend of the times. Therefore, the evolution of the female image embodied in them faithfully records the awakening and development of female consciousness, which can be regarded as a chronicle of feminism.

In the evolving role of the princess, we can observe several clearly evolving lines of growth in different films, with very progressive features. In terms of character, the princess gradually moves from weakness and cowardice to bravery and freedom; in terms of plot setting, the princess moves from being rescued to taking the initiative to grasp her own fate; even in terms of villain shaping, the simple dichotomy of the female villain's face is transformed into a three-dimensional and complete portrayal of the villain's role. With the subtle influence of three waves of feminism and the increasing status of women, more directors, writers and producers who are women or have a feminist consciousness have entered the Disney princess series, giving women the opportunity to constantly make a name for themselves and speak out for their rights. The development of feminism in the Disney princess films is systematic and encompasses all stages of the development of American feminism to the present day. Therefore it has a high research value and is an important historical source for the awakening of women's consciousness.

4.2. Shaping the Values of Young Audiences

Influenced by the change of social ideology and a wide range of audiences, Disney princess movies also have an impact on young audiences, influencing their outlook on life and values. Because of their ease of distribution and wide audience, movies have a profound impact on the formation of people's worldview and values. Movies help guide them to establish values, so they are playing an increasingly important role in visual culture communication and social education functions.

As Alan King says: all fairy tales are essentially adult fairy tales, which don't include the psychological needs of children, but the psychological metaphors of adult society [7]. Thus, in the traditional Disney princess movies, the image of the disciplined princess under the male gaze is widely seen in the public eye. When such images created by adults flowed into the public sphere and became familiar to teenagers at the time, the idea that one's fate is closely attached to men was inevitably implanted in their minds, causing a negative impact on teenagers who had not yet formed their worldview.

The new Disney Princess series not only brings aesthetic enlightenment to young viewers through its beautiful graphics and plot design, but also stimulates viewers' thinking with its progressive feminist core, sowing the seeds of female consciousness early on. Such a vivid and interesting first lesson in feminism will eventually set off a new generation of feminist frenzy. At the same time, this type of film and the way it portrays the protagonist have far-reaching implications for optimizing the current form of moral education in China and promoting the development of the film industry [8].

4.3. Limitations of the New Age Princess Image

It is true that the new age princess movie represented by "Frozen" has fired the first shot of feminism. But those movies are not perfect, there are still limitations in them.

Take Frozen as an example, first of all, the film repeatedly hope to use the "glove" imagery to emphasize the growth of Princess Elsa changes. The glove represents her from the fear of her own ability to the courage to release their own power. But such an awakening of self-awareness is essentially passive, because whether she initially puts on the gloves or eventually takes them off, it is not her initiative. The gloves were put on because of her father's advice and persuasion, and the gloves were taken off because of fear and impulse in the face of crisis. "The prerequisite for female self-awakening is the emergence of self-awareness, i.e., thinking in terms of one's own feeling experience and thus affirming the value of self-existence [9]." From this, it is clear that Aisha's initiative cannot be fully called an awakening of self-awareness.

Moreover, the film gives an almost utopian ending, but it does not point out the real way out for women's independence. The ending of the film replaces the traditional princess movie of love and marriage with the affection and friendship between Aisha and Anna, but as Pavlova's "The Second Sex" says, "Women can generate great power when they come together, but in a male society, women are scattered by marriage and family, and cannot generate a sense of community, so it is difficult to form a real alliance among women. " The film's idealized female alliance can only serve as a temporary refuge, but cannot be a real way for women to stand in a male-dominated society.

However, the film still reflects the progressive consciousness of being free from male gaze and self-restraint everywhere, which is an important step in the development of feminism in the Princess series.

5. Conclusion

After 80 years of development, the Disney Princess series of animated films reflect the three major stages of the development of feminism. From Snow White, which regards love and men as the only goal of life, to Little Mermaid, which gradually rebelled against patriarchal oppression and sought for meaning and freedom in life, to Frozen, which committed itself to realizing its own value and encouraging diversified development. The three films imply the fate of women in their respective times, and such gratifying changes undoubtedly reflect the gradual rise of women's status. In the following princess films, we also expect more princesses to speak freely, completely get rid of male constraints and disciplines, and realize real self awareness.

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