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從當代社會分析迪士尼公主形象的轉變

Analysis of the Transformation of the Image of Disney Princess
from Contemporary Society

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I. Introduction

1. Motivation:

The Disney Princess series has always been a classic in Disney animation.
It is not difficult to find out from the movies that all the princesses have very different personality traits, but we rarely pay attention to the reason why the princesses have distinct character, behavior, ideas, and values.

2. Purpose:

We hope that we can look at the Disney Princess movie from a another angle. Instead of just looking at the happy and beautiful love story, we hope to clarify the historical background and the society's feelings about women's values. Therefore, we want to use this paper to understand the reasons why the princess needs to change and to probe into the value and meaning of each princess.

3. Method:

By watching the Disney films in detail and collecting historical events and materials that affect the development of the characters, we record our discoveries and thoughts.

4. Scope:

Disney's 10 classic princess films are selected as our research scope, from 1937~2016,.

II. Thesis

1. Princess image of each period
(1)1930~1960
(a) *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937):*
   Main role [Snow White]:

Snow White has fair skin, loves singing, and is good at doing housework, reflecting a good wife/mother image in the minds of men at that time. She shows the weak image of the princess - women in this period are beautiful, weak, shy, and they can only do housework at home. However, they lack the ability to support, save, and defend themselves, only waiting for the salvation from men. The appearance of the bad queen also highlighted the kindness of the princess.
   Supporting role [Dwarf]:

The seven dwarfs in the movie are all male. They live with Snow White, but they go to work during the daytime while Snow White stays home and do house chores.

(b) *Cinderella (1950):*

Main role [Cinderella]:

Cinderella also shows her weak point. When bullied by her stepmother and stepsisters, she doesn't know how to resist. She has to rely on the help of others, such as birds, small animals, and the fairy, to get rid of her difficulties. She also does not actively pursue freedom; instead, she accepts everything arranged for her. Her female autonomy and independence was weak.

Supporting role [rats]:

The two rats, Jack and Goss, are males, and they helped Cinderella many times. In the film, Jack and Goss, work together to save Cinderella when she is locked in the attic by her stepmother. The point is, both mice were male, and to some extent it reflects that women still need to be rescued by men.

(c) *Sleeping Beauty (1959):*

Main role [Aurora]:

After being cursed, Sleeping Beauty can do nothing but wait for the prince to come to her rescue. She is beautiful but helpless, and she cannot control her own fate. Her image is a typical princess who is fragile and needs to be taken care of by others. She has no ability to save herself and lacks the awareness of self-protection.

Supporting role [three fairies]:

The three fairies appear when Aurora is a baby, presenting their gifts to her. They are her guardians and try to protect her from subsequent harm.

(d) summary of this period

Princesses in this period are beautiful, with long hair and fair skin. However, they are weak, kind, and deceivable. At the end of the stories, the princes arrive in time, fall in love with them, kiss them, and save them from miserable life.

(2) 1990s

(a) *The Little Mermaid (1989):*

Main role [Ariel]

In the beginning, Ariel shows her own attitude in life – she is not satisfied with the status quo. She intends to go out of the traditional society and see the outside world. She tries hard to pursue her love and succeeds in winning her own happiness.   Contrary to the previous period, Princess Ariel gets rid of the image of being weak because she saves the prince from the storm in the sea. The role of being ignorant and helpless turns out to be the prince.

Supporting role [Prince Eric]

The prince is deceived by Ursula's magic, and seems more passive in love. Compared with Ariel, he falls into a foolish role.

(b) *Beauty and the Beast (1991):*

Main Role [Belle]:

The protagonist Belle is a girl who likes to read books. She no longer has the image of staying home and doing housework. Instead, she knows how to help the villagers and saves her father out of danger desperately, even though what she faces is a fierce beast. The film emphasizes the inner beauty of women, and appearance is no longer the focus of the plot. Furthermore, Belle pursues a spiritual companion rather than a good-looking Prince Charming. Therefore, she refuses rich, handsome Gaston and chooses the ugly-looking Beast. All that makes this film stand out.

(c) *Mulan (1998):*

Main role [Mulan]:

Mulan is no longer a female model with women virtues in the traditional Chinese society. On the contrary, she is a role with courage to choose the path of life. In addition, she no longer relies on men for protection. Instead, what she has done is much like a man's deed - she risks her life to save the country, which is usually done by men.

(d) summary of this period

The princesses in this period gradually get rid of the image of being saved by others. They are independent, courageous, decisive, and well-educated. Marrying a handsome man is not their only goal. What's more, they even begin to save others, and have their own thoughts and values. The main idea of the stories in this period does not just revolve around love, but reflects the inner thoughts of the princesses more vividly. This also shows that the status of women has gradually improved, so brave women will not make contemporary audiences feel uncomfortable.

(3)　2010~2016

(a) *Brave(2012):*

Main role [Merida]:

From the beginning, Merida shows a different temperament from ordinary women. She likes archery, and the costumes in the film were no longer as gorgeous as the previous princesses. When being proposed by the princes from other kingdoms, Merida refuses strongly because she does not want to lose her freedom, and therefore quarrels with her

mother. The film completely shows the conflict and confrontation between tradition and the new era.

(b) *Frozen(2013):*
   Main role [Elsa]:

   Unlike previous Disney princess movies focusing on love, *Frozen* is based on friendship and family relationships. In the film, Elsa is not pursued by any man and she does not show her desire for love from the opposite sex. Instead, Elsa perfectly reflects the image of a modern woman, who can also be the head of a country in the real world. She bravely protects her people as a queen and is highly respected, revealing women's wisdom and perseverance.

(c) *Moana(2016):*
   Main role [Moana]:

   The protagonist Moana is a chief's daughter who shoulders the task of the survival of the tribe. She is very different from other princesses because she is encouraged to be independent, strong, adventurous and determined by her grandmother. It is interesting to see that a princess is dark-skinned, muscled, and masculine, which is completely opposite to the stereotype of a typical princess. Besides, this play is based on friendship, without love component.

(d) Summary of this period

   The princesses in this period have made a major breakthrough, overthrowing the stereotype of princesses in the past. They have the ability to become leaders and have the autonomy in marriage. These princesses no longer live for love, and they have their own ideals and values, making an effort to realize their dreams.

3. Historical events which affect the development of character image

(1) Economic recession (1920~1930s):

   When *Snow White* was launched, it happened to meet economic recession in the US. In this period of time, American people were uncertain about their future and were in need of such a wonderful fairy tale to satisfy their barren spirit.

(2) Second World War (1937~1945):

   The inspirational plot in *Cinderella*, which was launched after World War II, acts as a soothing factor to help the people who suffered in the war to step out of sorrow and face the reality. They see hope and light in this fairy tale, just as poor Cinderella would turn out to be a happy princess.

(3) second wave of feminism(1960s~1980s) :

Feminism is a social theory and political movement, which mainly uses women's experience as a source and motivation, and pursues gender equality, including eliminating gender stereotypes and striving to create equal education and career opportunities for women. In addition to criticizing social relations, many feminist supporters also focus on the analysis of gender inequality and the promotion of women's rights, interests and issues. (adapted from
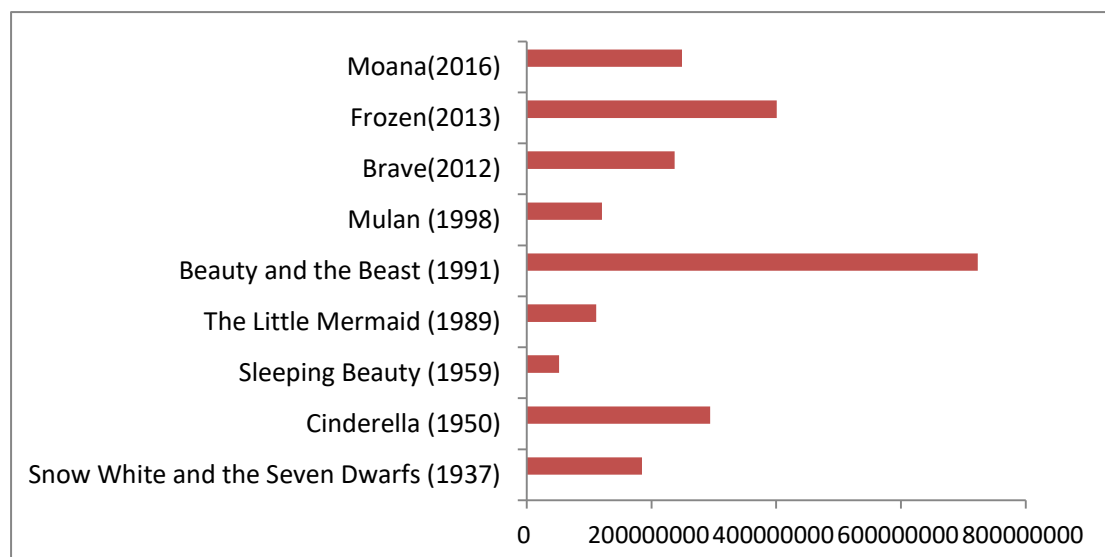
https://zh.m.wikipedia.org/zh-tw/%E5%A5%B3%E6%80%A7%E4%B8%BB%E7%BE%A9?fbclid=IwAR3GLNhlKOVesfB15QGu5e1P-8W0D2K9B8lofZ00aP7eZ5bolc1kXjfTfpA)

The second wave of feminism focuses on achieving comprehensive equality for men and women in the society and economy. In addition, this feminism also emphasizes that women have the right to be physically independent, rather than being wholly-owned by men. This awareness of feminism leads to the unsatisfactory box office on *Sleeping Beauty* in 1959, and the contemporary audience gradually do not identify with such a story.

What's more, feminism also causes Disney not to launch the next princess movie, *the Little Mermaid,* until 30 years later. This movie shows that the Disney film production company is gradually influenced by the feminist trend. In the story of the *Little Mermaid*, little mermaids help their youngest sister to bravely pursue her love, against the plot of patriarchal oppression. This change is definitely the impact of feminism.

4. people's degree of acceptance from the box office

The following table shows the sales records of Disney's previous movies. It can also be interpreted as the acceptance of the film by the public, reflecting the change in the perception of female roles in contemporary society.

(1) the highest box office record - *Beauty and the Beast*:

It is obvious too see that *Beauty and the Beast* takes the audience by storm. This may be the influence of enlightenment feminism since the 18th century. The main character, Belle, is the representative of Enlightenment feminism, revealing the ability and characteristics of modern women. Belle shares the personality traits that are so different from other ordinary women, who makes an impression on the audience around the world.

(2) the lowest box office record - *Sleeping Beauty*:

The character image of typical princess is too repetitive, which makes contemporary people tired of such a role. Therefore, because of the gradual rise of feminism, the storyline of *Sleeping Beauty* waiting to be saved is gradually being cast aside. It has become the most unsatisfactory movie in terms of the box office of the Disney Princess series.

The box office reflects people's acceptance of this movie. From the above, it can be seen that the box office does have a certain relationship with historical events.

III.   Conclusion

After our investigation and research, we found that with the change of the times, the Disney Princess series has indeed kept pace with the times. Changes in the economy and society have become the basis for Disney's next movie - launching a movie that best fits the contemporary atmosphere. In this era of free and open thinking, unless corresponding changes are made over time, they will soon be eliminated. Disney is willing to step out of the frame and continue to innovate. Maybe it has experienced failure,

but it has not stagnated. Instead, it knows how to adapt itself to the times, and continue to launch a more popular movie. It has different definitions of the term "princess". Why can't they be surpassed.

The representative of princess may be Snow White or Cinderella, but after our research, we can clearly find that the image of Disney Princess has gradually changed with historical background. We have summarized the conclusion of this research as follows:

1. There is a link between the Disney Princess and the rise of contemporary female awareness.
2. The character portrayal of Disney princess follows historical and social contexts.
3. Box office sales and feminist status of Disney Princess movies are linked.
4. Disney princesses in the early, middle and late stages represent the roles of contemporary women.
5. We speculate that there will be breakthroughs and innovations in the role of Disney Princess in the future.

IV.　　References

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