

The Journey of Feminist Awakening: On the Transmutation of the Emotional Attitudes of Disney Princesses in Film

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Abstract

The Disney Princess series has been running for more than 80 years, from 1937 to the present day, and the characters have evolved over time due to the different contexts in which they have been portrayed, which in turn has led to significant differences in their surface image and inner psychology. This paper uses the love of the Disney princesses as a clue to divide into three historical stages. Through the examination of the princesses' concept of love, it reflects that the image of the princesses, like the women in the real society, is gradually awakening to the consciousness of women under the changing historical context, and the princesses are growing, breaking through and thus realizing themselves.

Keywords

Disney Princess; Love; Feminine Consciousness.

1. Introduction

The Disney Princess concept was created by Disney President Andy Mooney in the early 2000s, bringing together a number of Disney animations featuring women and making it a highly influential brand image for the company. There are currently 14 officially certified Disney princesses, and the 13 animated films featuring these 14 princesses are known as the "Disney Princess Series". The related princess sequels and live action films are not examined. Looking back at the 13 Disney Princess films, it is easy to see a clear lineage in the evolution of the image of the princess, namely the awakening of female consciousness. The film hides this awakening in the female protagonist's attitude towards love, from seeing it as the only thing to seeing it as a plural factor in her life, affirming the value of her own life to rejecting it in the story to the point of falling into a narrative of rejection of men in the present. The constant transmutation of love, one of the timeless themes in the human narrative, in the Disney Princess series implies a whole process of female consciousness awakening and the writing of the historical context of the world's women and even the world's affirmative action movement. Using the element of love in film as a basis for the historical staging of the Disney Princess series, the current 13 films can be roughly divided into three periods: the Classical period, when love is the sole theme; the Awakening period, when love is part of life; and the Rebellion period, when love dissipates in the story. These three periods also resonate with the cultural context of the society of the time, and the different views of the princesses on love catering to the awakening and development of female self-awareness in contemporary society.

2. Narratives of Love in the Classical Period (1937-1959)

The classical period of the Disney Princess series, mainly *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty* are so called because the basic structure of the stories follow the principle of matching marriages between families, i.e. the identity of the main characters as princesses and princes. And the characterization of the main characters has the beauty of the classical period, with the chivalrous loyalty and bravery of the prince matched by the beauty

and goodness of the princess. The film begins with love at first sight and ends with the marriage of the prince and the princess, a typical love narrative of the classical period. The three white princesses are also portrayed in a more classical aesthetic, "virtuous", "slender" and "soft". And love for the princesses seems to be a generalized concept from heaven, because of the closed environment of their own upbringing, love is all the fantasy of the young girl for the world outside the palace and family. The princesses were active in the private sphere of marriage and family, at a time when the princess film coincided with the interval between the two feminist movements, and when the complex social and cultural context once again imposed new rules and regulations on women. During this period of global economic crisis, in order to avoid the unrest of the middle class, which is the middle force of the society, leading to a bigger social crisis, cinema was an important tool of cultural propaganda, and harmony, warmth and nature were the keynote of cinema to cover up the social ills on the screen. So these princess movies in the princess can be free to live in harmony with the small animals in the forest, is a typical embodiment of this harmonious and warm factor. The first animated feature film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* released in 1937, for example, the film then collected \$ 8 million at the box office, and won the Academy Award. The success of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* depended not only on Disney's ingenuity in animation technology, but more importantly on the cultural and political needs of American society at the time of the P/E ratio. [1] Under the influence of Roosevelt's New Deal, the United States was gradually emerging from the gloom of the economic crisis, and the budding vision of a harmonious and warm society was birthed in the film. As the dwarfs of the miners are the representatives of the simple working people of the United States, they protect Snow White with their simple goodness, with the evil queen on behalf of the dark and evil forces to make resistance. Such a film setting is important for eliminating social class conflicts and celebrating social stability. And the 1950 release of *Cinderella* will be like a dream of *Cinderella* story on the screen, through the hardships but the harvest of love Cinderella symbolizes the end of World War II, the American people out of the trauma of war, to start a new life. In the 1950s and 1960s, the civil rights movement of black Americans against racial discrimination and the student movement led by the New Left actively contributed to the development of the women's movement. So the 1959 release of *Sleeping Beauty* as the Disney Princess series of animation in the shortest appearance of the princess, the lack of distinctive character of Princess Aloha and the gradual rise of the U.S. women's affirmative action movement advocated by the image of women deviated from the box office, resulting in a disastrous failure, since then Disney will freeze the princess series of films for thirty years.

Recalling the Disney princess series of the classical period, which coincided with the beginning of the feminist movement in the United States, where women had long lived in deep-rooted social discrimination. Being a good wife, a good mother, in short, being a good housewife is the most important of all jobs in the world [2]. This was a common demand for women by men in the society of that time. The two world wars allowed women to get out of the house for more jobs, and when the wars were over men naturally came up with a theory for women to return to the home in order to regain these jobs occupied by women. Frida Miller then declared that "public opinion shifted from a phase of excessive praise promoting women's omnipotence to another theme: that women should gladly give up all work and return to the field that suited them - the kitchen." [3] In a male-centered society, women are just like Snow White who cannot survive on her own after leaving her castle and needs to rely on the seven elderly gnomes to take her in, or like Elo who suffers from the curse of fate and can only sleep in her castle "home" waiting for the prince's rescue. "Home" is the only field for women to survive, Snow White was taken in to pay for the dwarfs to organize the household chores. Every day when the seven dwarfs go out to mine, Snow White at home is cleaning, laundry, cooking, forming the traditional family framework of male domination and female domination. And Cinderella's

young and beautiful and good at domestic work female role identity is the male perspective of the ideal encounter, so Cinderella get the prince's favor from the film is because of her praise for this female duty perseverance. In the three princess series of animation, as the villain Snow White in the evil queen, Cinderella's stepmother and stepsister, the witch in *Sleeping Beauty* does not contain the desire and aspiration for power. The abstracted evil in them contrasts with the goodness and beauty of the princesses. Pious, tender and pure, the princesses of the family are waiting for love to come in a passive and negative way, rather having love is the best way for them to realize the value of their lives and change their situation. The princesses regard love as the only meaning of their lives, *Sleeping Beauty* Ello in the forest to the small animals to tell their dreams of the man, Snow White always believe that "one day my prince will come to me". So in the classical period princesses were always in a position of passive rescue, love was their only choice in life, and their rescue by their lover was the only end of their lives. Snow White's resurrection and *Sleeping Beauty's* awakening were dependent on the prince's kiss of true love, and Cinderella had relied on the marriage with the prince to get rid of her bad situation. The male is responsible for saving women, and the weakness of the princess figure caters to the patriarchal ideology of the society at that time: the affirmation of male value status and the expectation and demand for women to stick to their domestic roles.

3. The Princesses of Gradual Awakening (1989 - 2010)

In 1989, thirty years of silence, the release of the Disney princess series *The Little Mermaid* to a red-haired, blue-eyed dream of Ariel image of the classical period of the three princesses stereotypical image to respond. From Ariel onwards, love is no longer the only faith in the lives of the princesses, so their lives no longer revolve solely around their love and family. The princesses aspire to a whole new world, using their courage to break through the norms of male discourse, pursuing their dreams and owning their differences. The changing image of the princesses in the Disney princess series is shown to the audience while also being influenced by social contextual thinking, mapping the development of feminist thinking and changing gender power relations in society in a new phase. In the 1960s, the "Second Wave Feminist Movement" broke through class, race and national boundaries to emphasize the equality of social rights for both sexes and the liberation of women's ideology on a global scale. In addition to their biological definition, women belonged to a certain class or race and had their own unique life experience. [4] Under the influence of feminist thinking, how to build a female image with female consciousness and shape an independent and comprehensive diversity of women has also become the problem faced by the Disney princess series. So at this time, the Disney princess series appeared French country girl Belle, Chinese girl Mulan, Indian girl Pocahontas, the African Americans girl Tiana, etc., across a number of national class race constitutes this period of the Disney princess series spectrum.

Dream is an important keyword belonging to the awakening period of the Disney Princess series. *The Little Mermaid* Ariel as a mermaid but has a real sense of their own dreams, to go to the land of human life. This different dream makes her become an alien in the marine society, so in the face of her father's opposition to her dream, she can take an extreme act to make a deal with the witch, using her voice in exchange for legs to go to the land to realize their dreams to make their love. Ariel's pursuit of dreams and harvest love complement each other, so love is no longer the only choice in the lives of princesses, dreams and love are equally important. So Ariel became "Disney's first heroine with a modern personality"[5]. Thereafter, Tiana in *The Princess and the Frog* has always dreamed of starting her own restaurant, so she can work day and night without stopping in order to save money. Rapunzel" Lepe in order to leave the tower to the palace to see the sky lantern, in the "mother" "cannot survive by themselves" under the admonition, Lepe choose in the tower to learn a variety of life skills to improve themselves. The

spirit of never giving up in the pursuit of dreams gives the princesses of this period a unique temperament. In terms of story structure, the princess series of this period broke away from the love at first sight model of the classical period. This love at first sight model is often constructed behind a set of appearance criteria, the handsome and handsome prince and the princess's soft and beautiful is its love consideration. This period of the film from *Beauty and the Beast* began to break this pattern, as the prince with the appearance of the beast obviously does not meet the standard of love at first sight, and Belle can choose to accept the love of the beast lies in her own independent thinking and judgment. In traditional societies, power often comes from the accumulation of various kinds of knowledge under education, so it is natural for men in patriarchal societies to make objections to female education in order to maintain their central dominance, because knowledge allows women to have ideas that are not conducive to their control over them. As Belle's suitor Gaston said, "A woman shouldn't read too many books, or she'll have opinions and ideas." Belle is an alien in this male-dominated society, she loves to read, so when she met the same love of reading, can think rationally beast prince, the two love because of the soul and become a waterfall. In Tiana and Lepe's story, their love is highly serendipitous in their lives, and the male characters appear only because of incidental accidents. At the beginning of the encounter, there is no budding love between the hero and heroine, and even slightly repulsive. Although the prince wants to use money to get Tiana's kiss, and Eugene takes Le Pei to the palace to see the sky lantern, but in the process of getting along with the male protagonist, it is the dream that occupies the center of Tiana and Le Pei's life, and love only begins to sprout after they experience all kinds of things in the world to understand each other. The classical love at first sight model is broken, and the beautiful love is only a decoration on the princesses' life journey, but not the whole picture of their lives.

At the end of the 20th century, the existence of discrimination within women regarding racial class and other issues received strong attention, so the Disney Princess series of films did not only depict the beautiful love about the white princesses, but also broke through the boundaries of race and began to tell the story of the princesses of color. In the film *Aladdin*, the heroine Princess Jasmine, although only briefly, but she was dissatisfied with the match arranged by her father, the courage to leave home, her love with Aladdin is not love at first sight, is mutual understanding after the mutual affection, so Princess Jasmine such an exotic princess with Arabian style in is a rebellion against the patriarchy and the pursuit of dreams in the courage shown, is common to women of all races. The Chinese princess "Mulan" is Disney's image of a princess who aspires to be herself and thus blurs her gender. The film is full of resistance to the traditional marriage system itself. In the era when women must be submissive to the four virtues, and women must marry a good family to honor their ancestors, Hua Mulan is out of step with the whole era, but the opportunity to recruit soldiers by the emperor's edict gives Hua Mulan a chance to break through and realize her self-worth. Hua Mulan's taking her father's place in the army is an abandonment of her self-feminine image, but when the pretense of a male role is stripped away, the identity of a female role leads to her abandonment again, so Hua Mulan, as a woman under the traditional patriarchal society, is herself completely unacceptable to the male society. However, when Hua Mulan bravely sacrificed herself to save the emperor and the lieutenant Li Xiang, she succeeded in breaking through the shackles of traditional society on her own and gained the affirmation of women from the male discourse. In the film *Pocahontas*, the traditional story structure of the princess story in pursuit of true love is broken, Pocahontas did not choose to leave with her lover Shoemaker, as the daughter of the Indian chief she chose to stick to the tribe for the sake of their tribe and people. Pocahontas has love but chooses to leave it behind. Under the shape of such an ending, she achieves the greatest sublimation of her personal values and interrogates the value of women's lives.

The princesses of the awakening period, they abandoned the past beauty, passive and soft princess image, both external and internal are very personal. They are brave enough to break

the shackles of traditional rules and take the initiative to fight against tradition and oppression under the pressure of reality. They break the shackles of the image of women and the demands of women that have been solidified under the male discourse for thousands of years, and then reflect on the root cause of women's oppression. "In traditional patriarchal societies, women are given the attributes of objects and are seen as the private property of the family or of the husband of the parents' own, predicated on the existence of others." [6] The awakened princesses prove the value of their choices with the success of their quest for their dreams, thus realizing a critique of patriarchal society. At the same time, this period of rescue compared to the classical period also changed from male to female, the princesses became the story of the film's rescuers. *Beauty and the Beast*, Belle used her freedom in exchange for her father's life, in the process of her contact with the beast, mutual in-depth understanding, so that the original state of mind of the beast gradually returned to normal, to achieve the rescue of the beast, at this time to give the kiss of true love is no longer a male but a female. *Hua Mulan*, on the other hand, stands directly on the height of the nation and the state, and uses her wit and bravery to accomplish the rescue of the society at large. Women as saviors contribute to their families and society, promoting their own liberation and success. Although in the process of its role as a savior, the love factor is indispensable, but love is no longer all the princesses, they have their own mission, have their own dreams, they are completely their own, rather than a male subordinate. But it's worth thinking about love, or a treat for the princess. The general follows Mulan back home, and Tiana finally admits that without love, wishes, even if granted, are not so wonderful; while Lepe shows the witch that she is willing to give up her freedom and return to her original prison in order to save her lover's life. Although love is far from being the usual lifesaver in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, it is still a logical and best ending for the princesses. In the stories of *The Princess and the Frog* and "Rapunzel", the princesses are still vulnerable in the face of such a dilemma of choosing between the two, and although they have made no small effort to realize themselves, they finally choose love. Although love plays a different role, they are the only or best way for the heroine to be elevated in life. From the beginning of the unthinking total submission to love, to the later seemingly deliberate compromise, the princesses' self-awareness is only in a social pattern that has not changed at all, there is a degree of difference, they are at most only made to be accepted by the general audience of resistance, their so-called independence, is to be cared for by men, love is always their ultimate refuge.

4. The Story of the Princess Who Dared to Choose Rebellion (2012-2018)

But after 2012 in the Disney Princess series, the status of love has taken a sharp turn for the worse, so much so that it receded among the films. With the development of feminist thinking, the concept of women in society has changed greatly, especially the economic development of society has given women more opportunities and rights, women pay more attention to self-improvement and perfection, so the image of female characters in various films has become more independent and autonomous. Unlike the perspective of the traditional feminist school, "the mere advocacy of shouting against men, this way of struggle has lost its status, people including women recognize the existence of differences between men and women, women can recognize, retain this biological difference based on the acquisition of self-confidence and self-esteem, the object that women have to struggle, from men to change their own inner inferiority and sensitivity, friendly with men" [7], in recognition of differences, women are concerned with internal self-improvement and self-worth. During this rebellious period, the examination and exploration of the self-became an important story theme in the Disney Princess series of films. The image of Merida in *Brave* is extremely bold, she is not in the standard image of a princess, but exists as an archer, a female character with extraordinary combat power, she does not need

a male to save, so the movie is no longer about the love story of the prince and the princess, but the story of how the princess guards her country away from the prince. In order to change her mother's mind about the need for women to get married, she turns to a witch, but unexpectedly makes her mother turn into a brown bear. Later in Melida's journey, although she met a handsome prince, but the film does not tell too much about it, but to explore a more important theme of mother-daughter bonding. So the story of *Bravery* is about a mother and daughter, a story of relationship repair between mother and daughter. In the journey of mother and daughter together, Melida and her mother re-establish a new way of communication and repair the gap between them, thus completing the growth of herself from a willful girl to a princess who thinks about her relatives and her country. So the meaning of life of female characters is no longer just about love, but also into the dimension of affection, has become a new theme of the film, the Disney princess series of films also completed a shift from love to true love to expand. *Frozen* as a Disney Princess series for the first time in an animation, at the same time two princess characters appear in the animated film, showing the sincere affection between the sisters and the search for self. The film "Anna finally abandoned and their love at first sight Prince Hans, but the film does not account for her and Christopher have a lover finally married, and Aisha is always no love, Disney through such a film to the audience to shape a lively and confident independent transformation of society, completely independent of male redemption of the female image." [8] The paragraph about true love's kiss is also different from the previous male to female rescue, but the sisterly affection between Anna and Aisha, sincere tears to destroy the magic, true love is no longer just a narrow sense of love, but extended to the love of relatives. In *Moana* tells how Moana led her people to rediscover their identity as seafarers. The film is filled with thoughts on how to find your true self. Whether it's the spell that failed after stealing the heart of the ocean, Maui, under the guidance of *Moana*, understood that what made it Maui was not the god of the sky, but himself, or in the face of the disaster caused by the evil card, *Moana*, with the help of the sea, found that the evil card is the god of the ocean that once guarded the world, Te Fiti. "This is not the real you", "you decide yourself" This is Moana's guidance to Te Fiti to rediscover himself, and eventually the heart of the ocean returns, the evil card reverts back to Te Fiti, and the disaster stops. The film is a story about the ocean, a story about environmental protection, a story about finding oneself, but definitely not a love story. As Woolf believed, it is more important to become yourself than anything else. [9]

Although a question worth thinking about emerged, for the rebellious period of the Disney princess series for male characters almost killed off the charm. The *Bravery* in several chief's sons, the appearance of the son has nothing to do with tall and handsome, and does not have the traditional sense of an excellent male protagonist should have the qualities of bravery, valor, resourcefulness, etc., their skill in archery is not even as good as Princess Melida. And the prince in *Frozen* became a direct villain, hoping to seize the rights of the kingdom through marriage. *Moana* in the huge, wild and wild demigod Maui and child-like Moana is not a couple at all. Therefore, male characters at this time are often in a supporting role, and are implicitly criticized, or even become villains, and unpopular with the audience. This makes people think about whether love is inappropriate or unimportant to the princess, these male characters seem destined to be discarded, because the idealized image of the prince and the princess is difficult not to let the audience to generate associations about love, so in order to eliminate this association, love is directly discarded by the story, because love seems to naturally conflict with the goal of achieving self, so that a complete independent self cannot be established.

It can be noted that in the 2018 Disney animated film *Ralph Breaks the Internet*, all the princesses of the Disney princess series are shown together for the first time, playfully stating the criteria for a so-called Disney princess in the form of a question to Winnipeg. The most crucial of these questions is "Do you think that only a strong man can solve your problems". Winnipeg's affirmative answer led the Disney princess to agree that she was a "real princess".

From Snow White to Princess Jasmine they all need the prince's rescue, it is in the prince's rescue of their dreams to be completed. From Pocahontas to Tangled, the prince and the princess became side by side combat partners, they have contributed to the peace of the two tribes Pocahontas and Zhuang Maes, there are in the battlefield to fight the enemy together Mulan and Li Xiang, there are turned into frogs and together to find the identity of Tiana and the prince, as well as in the road to the castle to help each other Rapunzel and Eugene. From the beginning of *Bravery*, Princess Melida no longer uphold the plot of falling in love with the prince. Even in *Frozen* and *Oceanic* is a weaker role of men, the prince began to act as the villain, the film staged the prince unreliable plot, and Moana in *Moana* did not have a prince to match. But these films, men still play the function of accompanying and helping women grow, whether it's wilderness survivor Kristoff to help Anna find Elsa or, demigod Maui in *Moana* adventure on the road to teach her sailing and combat, at this time the Disney princess, although not sitting on her hands, relying on the prince to solve problems, and even in most cases can act as the prince's rescuer, but without the assistance of men, the princess seems to be unable to complete the task independently, Disney's princess is still not free from male control to achieve true female independence. In the process of the princess to Yunnilop questions there is a problem is often overlooked, but this question constitutes the core of the story of the Disney Princess series, that is, Snow White asked: "Have you ever experienced true love's kiss", "true love's kiss" the symbol of love in the Disney Princess series of films is infinitely magnified. In the love stories of classical times, the prince's true love's kiss was the medicine to save the princess. In *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the prince used true love's kiss to wake up the princess who was poisoned by the poisoned apple, and in *Sleeping Beauty*, the prince used true love's kiss to lift the curse of the princess who slept for a hundred years. And in the period of awakening, the princess holds a certain initiative. In addition to *The Little Mermaid* in the only prince's true love's kiss can be exempted from the fate of Ariel turned back into a mermaid, *H* in the princess began to save the prince with true love, Bell used her love to change the prince from a beast back to a human. The Tangled in Lepe with the tears of true love to bring Eugene back to life, *The Princess and the Frog*, Tiana and the prince's kiss of true love made the two restore the identity of human. But for the Disney princess series of films, the theme of romantic love though the most representative of love. However, in a broad sense, the so-called true feelings should include all true feelings, it is not only from the love between partners, more likely to be family, friendship, as long as the feelings from the heart, are worthy of being sung or emphasized. In fact for the rebellious period of the princess, the Brave Melida with a heart full of true love to say I love you to her mother, making her mother from the bear back to the original appearance. *Frozen* in the Aisha mistaken Anna need to get the prince's true love's kiss, in order to lift the magic, but the identity of the prince's villain is naturally impossible to achieve, the final is Anna and Aisha two princesses between the family and friendship cracked the magic. The re-affirmation of women's emotional power breaks through the previous path of seeing love as the only salvation, reflecting the further awakening of women's self-emotional consciousness in contemporary times, where love is no longer the only thing in a woman's life, or is no longer a necessity. "The wind of love in fairy tales has gradually come into line with the real world, and the changes of the times have brought a fresh breeze to today's Disney princesses." [10]

5. Towards a Postmodern Princess (2018 - Present)

In the year 2021, the affirmative action movement on minorities, women's issues and LGBT groups is once again gaining momentum around the world, and film and television companies, represented by Disney, have started a new series on princesses in the name of political correctness. The MeToo movement on women's affirmative action seeks to be fundamentally a movement to dismantle patriarchal institutions and culture. In recent years the MeToo movement has created an unprecedented cultural revolution in the United States. If the one

hundred and seventy years of American women's movement for gender equality has been an ongoing political and economic revolution, this movement of women saying no to the sexual privileges of powerful men is a cultural revolution. This movement sought to end the sexual privilege of powerful men and to change the power structure of sexual relations between the sexes, furthering the slogan of the second wave of feminism, "What is personal is political [11]. So Disney in the princess story *Raya and The Last Dragon* will completely erase the male protagonist, in the princess and love on the road, Disney seems to vow to love this universal human emotion to completely remove. The movie tells the story of Laya, the daughter of the chief of Dragon Newtown, and his female companion who can take human form as a small female dragon to overcome obstacles and persuade a powerful opponent, and together they save all of humanity. In the film the princess's partners were replaced with women, and the pre-princess series whether "Mulan" in the Mushu, or "Frozen" in the Snowball, male voiceover makes it a certain male setting, female characters just became the main role of the film. However, the simple accumulation of Southeast Asian cultural symbols and the simple portrayal of female characters in *Raya and The Last Dragon* made the audience lack freshness and expectation. The film has become a politically correct piece of work that appeals to women and minority groups.

The love in the Disney Princess animated series went from there to there, which though in a sense reflects the awakening of modern feminism. But more worth thinking about is that the Disney Princess series of stories, although they have been talking about love, although it seems that they have never told the real love. Disney does not believe in love, nor does it believe in friendship, the key to winning in *Raya and The Last Dragon* is trust, as in other princess animations, love is a concept that exists as long as it is believed, a symbol, a tool. Then the love that was once seen as life-changing in princess movies to the secrecy in the movies today, the love of princesses from soothing the audience to create fantasy dreams to become politically incorrect itself. But the story of the princesses after the rebellion period is not different from the love story of the princesses in the classical period, because whether love exists or not, in fact, the story of the princesses always avoids love itself.

The development of feminist thinking has promoted the transformation of women's ideology in society, and the changing image of women in the Disney Princess series of films precisely confirms the changes in the concept of gender and the image of women under the influence of social environment at different historical stages. The historical development of the Disney series of princesses from virtuous and soft to independent and autonomous is a process of the continuous awakening of women's consciousness in society. The historical examination of the image of Disney princess series leads to the discovery of the development of feminism as presented by the relationship between female images and the real society.

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