

## A Comparative Study on Female Character Design in Disney Animation

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### Abstract

*This paper examines how the design of female characters in Disney animations is evolving over time, and explores whether these changes are related to the social status of women in modern society. We analyze in detail how Disney's female character design has undergone changes in form, characteristics, and personality with the transition from 2D animation to 3D animation, and show that the change in perception of women in modern society is behind this change. It shows.*

*It deals with changes in the design and personality of female characters, focusing on major Disney animation works before and after 2010. Starting with the movie <Rapunzel>, released in 2010, female characters showed stronger and more active characteristics and changed from traditional Disney princesses. Disney is bringing about this social change by breaking away from the image of an independent woman and showing the growth process of overcoming hardships based on one's abilities and the support of one's family, as well as the increasing number of female characters of various races and appearances. The conclusion was reached that it shows a conscious and active willingness to accept it.*

**Key words:** *Disney animation, fairy tales, character design, modern society*

### 1. Introduction

Walt Disney's emergence as a world-renowned animation producer began with a short animation featuring the little mouse Mickey Mouse as its representative character, and later, Disney produced its first full-length animation, <Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs>, attracting attention to the animation film industry. It was the starting point for receiving .

Disney animations are characterized by adapting stories of good and evil, the eternal love of a prince and

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princess, and well-known myths, legends, and folk tales. <Snow White> was also a work inspired by German folk tales included in the <Stories for Children and Families> children's book created by the Grimm brothers, Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, and this children's book included It included various stories. In addition to Snow White, representative works such as <Sleeping Beauty> and <Rapunzel> were produced.

<Snow White> and <Sleeping Beauty>, released in 1937 and 1959 respectively, were based on the original work, but developed similar stories through Disney's adaptation. However, unlike previous works, <Rapunzel>, released in 2010, was presented as Disney's first 3D animation, and the content of the movie was also newly adapted according to the trend of the times, showing differences from the original.

Changes in the design of female characters appearing in Disney animation reflect the phenomenon of women's social participation.

## 2. Disney animations and original fairy tales

Until 2010, the way female characters were portrayed in classic animations such as Disney's <Snow White> and <Sleeping Beauty> were obedient, domestic, vulnerable, confronting villains, but ultimately saved by the character of a prince. It proceeded in a way that ended with a narrative of love and happiness. Disney Animation changed the way it produced animation based on the pattern of these traditional fairy tales, and in the 3D animated film Rapunzel since 2010, it began to break away from Disney's traditional female characters by showing the protagonist's desire for adventure and autonomy.

First of all, if you think about the Disney movie <Rapunzel>, Rapunzel is a cheerful and lively girl with blonde hair who glows golden and has magical powers when she sings, and a witch who covets Rapunzel's magical powers and kidnaps her from the royal palace and imprisons her in a tower. Typical examples include thieves who sneak in. However, in the original Rapunzel, all of the characters above are different except for Rapunzel's story.

The original story is about Rapunzel's parents handing their child over to a witch in return for stealing and eating magic lettuce named Rapunzel that grows in the garden of the witch who lives behind their house. There was none. And the prince from the original was portrayed as a different character in the movie, and it was clear that the characters from Disney and the original were slightly different.

**Table 1. Comparison of representative characters from Disney animation and the original**

Original fairy tale	Character	Disney animation
Long golden hair, loneliness, hatred of witches	Rapunzel	Magical golden hair, lively, very curious
prince of the kingdom	Male Character	Wanted criminal, very scared
Daughter handed over to couple	Witch	Break into the king and queen's bedroom Kidnapping Rapunzel

poor couple

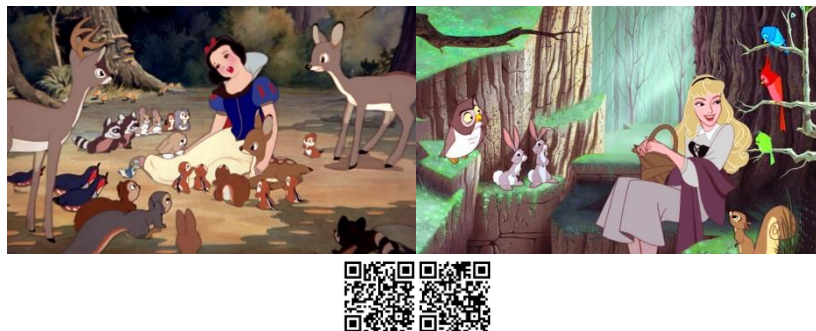
Rapunzel's Parents

king and queen of the kingdom

The only thing that is similar between the original and the movie Rapunzel is that the witch raised Rapunzel by locking her up in a tower, cut off from the outside world. She was merely acting as a ladder to lower her hair when the witch called, and was depicted as an obedient female protagonist like in other Disney animated films. However, Rapunzel in her movie has a curiosity about the outside world, and she also shows her strong side, such as her independence in going outside because she wants something and saving her male protagonist. This is a personality and appearance that has never been seen in Disney's traditional female characters that have shown only the submissive, domestic, and weak side of women until now.

### 3. Character design changes

Disney's common characteristics are large eyes, unique facial shapes, simple silhouettes, and expressive movements. These iconic Disney character designs have been consistent since the release of <Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs> in 1937. This design philosophy was rooted in Disney's traditional characteristics, and the 2D animation left a strong visual impression on people with its colorful colors, contrast between light and dark, lively expressions despite simple character movements, and illustrative design. And Disney's female characters are all obedient, and in the end, they meet male characters, overcome crises, and get happily married. However, if you look at Disney animation movies released after 2010, you can see that the character characteristics of early Disney animations are not visible.



**Figure 1. Disney female character design before 2010**

Since <Rapunzel> in 2010, the designs of Disney female characters in 3D animation have had common characteristics, and the texture of skin, flow of hair, and wrinkles of clothes have been expressed more realistically through realistic modeling and detailing, which are the characteristics of 3D animation, making the characters more realistic. Their appearance was more lively, they showed movement and camera composition that could not be expressed, and the three-dimensional effect was emphasized, effectively showing the visual appearance to people. Character design also began to show a variety of appearances that were not typical of the previous female characters.

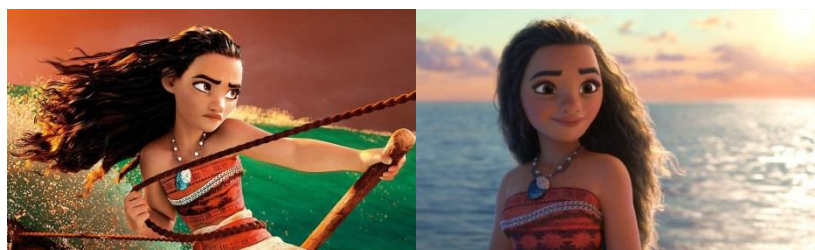


**Figure 2. Rapunzel and Frozen character design**

Disney's female character design showed a trend of innovation and evolution starting with <Rapunzel>, and unlike the existing classic Disney princesses, female characters showed active and challenging characteristics and began to bring about changes in character design. . Elsa and Anna, the characters from the movie "Frozen" released in 2013, are similar to Rapunzel and have traditional Disney characteristics in their character designs, but they do not show the female characters of the past and are saved by a character called a prince. It is not a story about living happily ever after, but two characters, Elsa and Anna, are interrupted by a character they thought was a prince, and Anna sacrifices herself to save Elsa. In the movie, we see Elsa overcome the ordeal alone to save Anna. I'm losing. This is similar to Rapunzel, but the end of the story can be said to be the first familial love shown, rather than the traditional Disney style.

Afterwards, the movie <Moana>, released in 2017, became another new starting point in Disney character design, and the Moana character showed racial diversity and new costume design, showing a different appearance from the typical Disney design of the past. Instead of the traditional characteristics of Disney female characters, she began to present a new image by showing a small, blunt nose and a body made of strong muscles.

Moana's personality also emphasizes her challenging and active characteristics, showing independence rather than dependence on the prince, and the process of overcoming trials alone and growing up with the help and support of her family provide new strength and roles for female characters. And once again, it was telling the story that Disney's female characters could change.



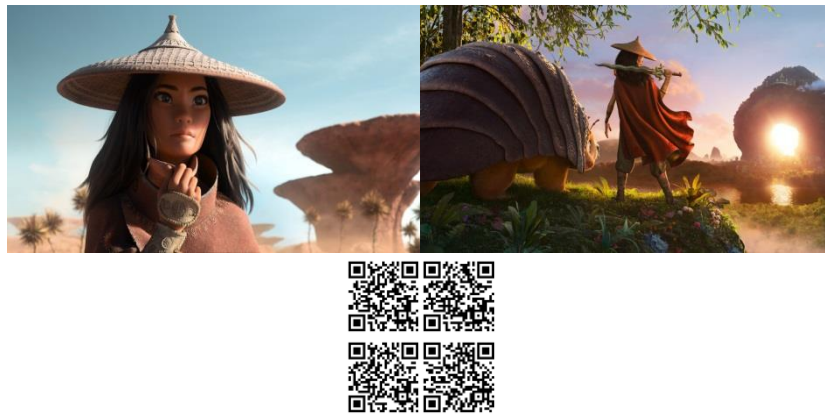


Figure 3. Movie Moana Raya and the Last Dragon

The characteristics of Moana's character design continue until the 2021 film <Raya and the Last Dragon>. The story of this Disney animation film continues to show growth in the face of crisis, and the female characters also show a variety of races and costume designs, and although their personalities are active, they are characters that show a little more fighting ability and agility than existing Disney female characters. It became a new look for the Disney Princess, and this change in character showed that Disney was trying to reflect changes in modern society along with the rise in the social status of women in modern society.

The fact that the design and personality of female characters in Disney animation can change is centered on the fact that modern society is changing greatly and has a common trend. The changes in modern society, where female characters can change, have been seen to change steadily little by little since 2013.

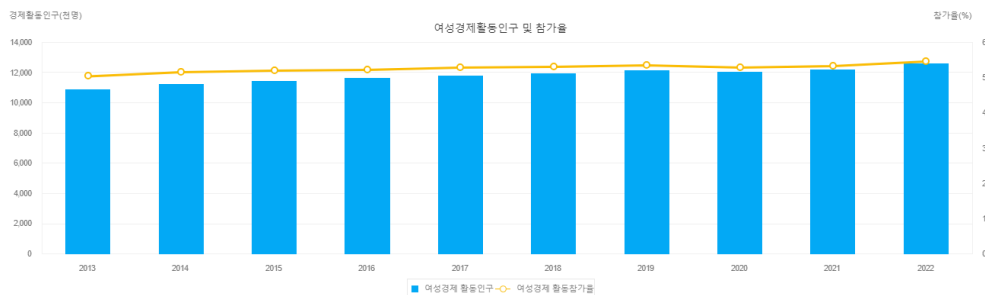


Figure 4. Female economically active population and participation rate

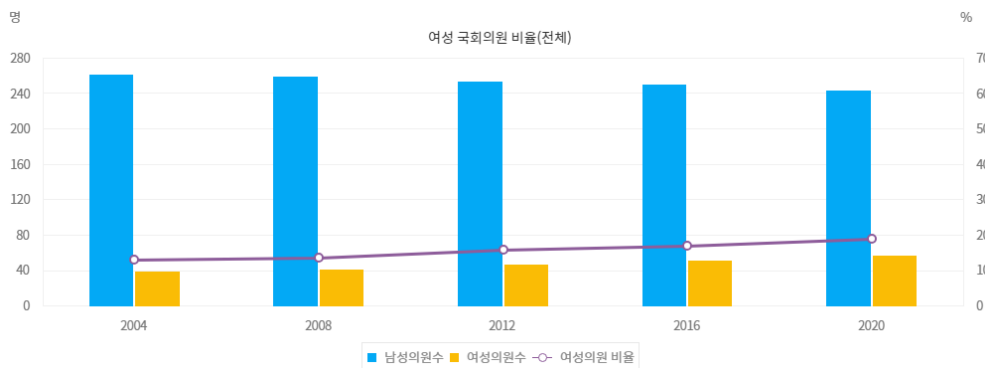
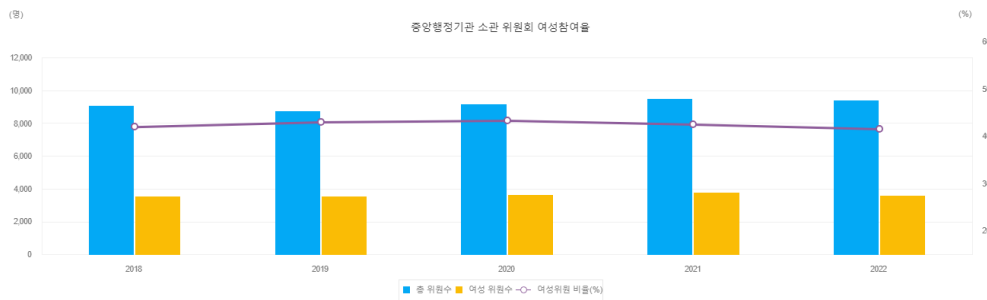


Figure 5. Proportion of female lawmakers



**Figure 6. Female participation rate in government committees**

In modern society, as the proportion of women is increasing in single-person elections, members of the National Assembly, and ministers, the number of women with a strong sense of independence has begun to increase. The period when women's status and roles began to enter increasingly important parts of society was similar to the period when changes in Disney animation began.

Current Disney animations, which feature many independent and strong characters, show the increasing number of women in modern society as above, breaking the stereotypes of traditional women or Disney princesses and showing a changed image of women who value their own identity, stories and characters. It is also reflected in the design, showing an image that various audiences can relate to. The fact that the design and personality of female characters in Disney animation can change is centered on the fact that modern society is changing greatly and has a common trend. The changes in modern society, where female characters can change, have been seen to change steadily little by little since 2013.

#### 4. Conclusion

Disney's character designs have undergone significant changes over the years, evolving from the iconic 2D animation era to the visually rich and realistic 3D animation era. Although the characteristics and movements of Disney's female characters and traditional princess characters have not disappeared, they have become noticeably less frequent.

These changes began to appear as an example of <Rapunzel>, released in 2010, gradually breaking away from the typical Disney princess archetype, and Rapunzel's character characteristics signaled a new era in Disney's portrayal of women, breaking away from the obedient female characters of the past. After this, the 3D animation era not only made it possible to depict characters more realistically, but also provided an opportunity to break away from the existing female character design.

In <Frozen>, released in 2013, Elsa and Anna appear, maintaining Disney design elements but breaking away from traditional characters, and the content of the movie emphasizes family love rather than the romantic arc that Disney has shown so far, marking an important start in the change in Disney's storytelling. In addition, follow-up characters such as 2017's Moana and 2021's Raya and the Last Dragon continue this trend by embracing racial diversity and introducing innovative costume designs, with the new character designs breaking away from Disney's traditional princess image. A new princess was revealed

In essence, Disney's character design is undergoing a dynamic evolution, from the established hallmarks of the 2D era to the immersive realism of 3D animation. Moreover, the evolution of the characters is not just about aesthetic changes, but also about the changing role of women in modern society. It was expanded to

the personality of the female character in the story. The journeys of Disney's female characters break away from traditional dependence on princes, emphasizing their sacrifices and challenging and active characteristics, and growth is depicted as a process of overcoming trials with the support and love of family. As he begins to show his role, he later begins to show many roles, including his combative side.

Therefore, as women's social status has risen, Disney has demonstrated a conscious effort to challenge stereotypes, embrace diversity, and reflect evolving social values and an intention to adapt. In modern society, the trend toward women with independent identities has increased, such as the increase in single-person households and women's political status and roles, and a wider audience has expanded due to diverse appearances, racial inclusivity, and strong character traits. It shows Disney's efforts to provide more progressive and relatable female protagonists.

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