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Ideologies Relevant to Cultures

In all ages, masterpieces composed by writers are filled with their ideas and values. So are the literary tales. When writers are creating new stories, they will add their ideas and values connected with their cultures and ideologies into their works. Nowadays, watching movies has become a major entertainment for people. At the same time, values held by movie directors and playwrights are disseminated like literary tales. Jack Zipes’ article “Breaking the Disney Spell” argues how Disney and his animations affect the perspectives we have about the fairy tales. In his article, Zipes concludes one of the important differences between oral tales and literary tales. He argues, “These tales did not represent communal values but rather the values of a particular writer.” Zipes means that writers add their own values rather than communal values to the literary tales, and these tales become a way to disseminate their values and ideas. I agree with his argument. Therefore, writers of different countries or different peoples will add their unique ideology to the story. I will use the Disney version of Cinderella (1950) and another adapted version from Lin Lan to support my argument. In my opinion, the Disney version of Cinderella represents American ideology and the version adapted by Lin Lan shows more Chinese ideology.

Disney is a famous American animator, who represents the values and culture of American people, while Lin Lan’s adaptation of Cinderella has more Chinese features. The Disney film Cinderella (1950) tells a story of a normal girl managing to become a princess through her own efforts and others’ help. The Chinese version of Cinderella from Lin Lan tells a story that a newly-married girl called Beauty is killed by the daughter of her stepmother and how she revenges.

Zipes believes that in the Disney animations, Walt Disney creates a fantasy for the audience. He writes, “The great "magic" of the Disney spell is that he animated the fairy tale only to transfix audiences and divert their potential Utopian dreams and hopes through the false promises of the images he cast upon the screen.” (333) Zipes means Disney changes some of the plots and characters in the original tale to make them ideal and satisfy the audience. Compared to the Chinese version of Cinderella from Lin Lan, the Disney version has less violence and punishment to bad people. In Lin Lan’s Cinderella, after knowing the yellow cow transformed from Beauty’s mother was helping Beauty, her venomous stepmother killed the yellow cow. In the story, the daughter of Beauty’s stepmother called Pock Face chose to push Beauty into the well to kill her, which is a more Chinese way comparing to the normal American way of killing­­——using some poison. The action of pushing the girl into the well can convey a more terrifying and vivid image to the audience. In my opinion, the most violent scene in Disney version is when the sisters are tearing Cinderella’s dress apart. However, Disney uses some technical means to make it less violent. He uses close shots instead of long shots to avoid audience from seeing the fight directly. The only things we can see are Cinderella’s face with horror, sisters’ faces with anger and the pieces of cloth torn down from Cinderella’s dress, which give the audience space to imagine. One of Zipes’ argument fits my analysis. He says, “The carefully arranged images narrate through seduction and imposition of the animator's hand and the camera.” Disney uses the magic of technology to make the scenes less violent, which is his own spells cast on the fairy tales.

What’s more, the punishments to people doing bad are different. In the American version, Lucifer (the cat) is the only one who receives a punishment, falling off from the chimney. But the punishment in Chinese version are more severe and terrifying. Whoever does the bad receives huge punishment, which is a Chinese ideology. Pock face tries her best to get rid of Beauty, but Beauty is just like a shadow following Pock Face everywhere, which has already been a punishment. At last, Pock Face walks up a ladder made of knives and jumps into the boiling oil. Beauty’s stepmother receives her daughters roasted bones and finally dead. Pock Face is the only person stepmother cares, therefore, the death of Pock Face is the biggest punishment for her. The differences between two versions show the different ideologies. The Chinese ideology emphasizes more about the punishments, which can be interpreted as whoever does the bad will receive punishment. The American ideology to minimize the violence and create an ideal fantasy for audience.

Zipes also argues about how fairy tales emphasize the aristocratic elite in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Zipes says, “Extremely few people could read, and the fairy tale in form and content furthered notions of elitism and separation.” (335) He believes that the literary content limited the people who can understand, because at that time only aristocratic or rich people were well-educated so that they could read. As far as I am concerned, during the 1950s, more people were educated, but the content of the Disney movies were still emphasizing elitism and separation. In the movie, when the king arranges a ball for the prince to find a princess, only well-dressed girls are allowed to attend. Gorgeous cloth is not only the ticket to the ball, but the opportunity to be the princess. Only rich or aristocratic people can have the ticket to the ball, poor girls can only dream and looking at the palace from the little garret. Also, there is a scene in the movie that Lady Tremaine are training her two daughters about singing and playing musical instruments, which is a symbol of noble and rich. In the movie, every girl’s dream is marrying the prince, which can give them a giant leap of social status, emphasizing the aristocratic elite. In the Chinese version of Cinderella, there is also a sign of elitism. When Beauty is riding, one of her shoes slips off and falls into the ditch. People nearby want to help her, with the only condition of marrying them. She turns down the offers of a fishmonger, a clerk from the rice shop and an oil merchant. She finally agrees to marry a scholar. The scholars made up a large part of ancient Chinese elite. And the imperial government chose officials from the scholars, which made their social status higher than normal people. Also, the social status of merchant was the lowest in ancient China, because the imperial government did not encourage citizens to do business. In my opinion, the reason why Beauty chooses to marry the scholar is not only the appearance, but she wants to improve her social status. Therefore, both the American and Chinese versions show a common ideology of praising aristocratic elite and pursuing a higher social status.

When comparing different versions of snow white, Zipes argues that, “In particular the animals befriend Snow White and become her protectors.” (347) I think his words can be interpreted as teamwork and help are important. In the Disney version, Cinderella makes friends with the animals and her care of the animals finally pays back. But in the Chinese version of Cinderella, there is not much teamwork. The American society values teamwork a lot and encourages teamwork which brings mutual benefits. However, there are still some similarities between the Disney version and Chinese version. Both versions show the ideology that good people will be rewarded. In the Disney version, the animals are the helpers of Cinderella, and they do a lot of essential work during Cinderella’s way to the princess. They help her make the dress for the ball, and help her to unlock the door of the garret so that she can meet the duke and prove herself the one prince wants. Their effort finally pays off, for they go into the palace with Cinderella. In the Chinese version, the old woman lives near the scholar helps Beauty to come back to life, Beauty makes meals for the old woman in return.

In the last part of Zipes’ article, he believes that the male-manipulation tradition has passed from the literary tales to Disney movie like snow white. He argues, “No matter what they may do, women cannot chart their own lives without male manipulation and intervention, and in the Disney film, …” (348) He thinks that the success of women is determined by the men. I disagree with this point. In the Disney version, the prince is who should determine things according to Zipes’ theorem, but the prince only shows up during the ball and the final wedding. Instead, I think Cinderella uses her own efforts to be the princess. She does whatever Lady Tremaine asks her to do to earn herself the opportunity to attend the ball and prove herself. She lives an optimistic life and makes herself the princess. Cinderella’s behavior shows the American ideology of working hard and making success with self-efforts. In the Chinese version, there is also no evidence of male-manipulation.

From the analysis above, we can find that the Disney and Chinese version of Cinderella have American and Chinese ideologies in them. Also, the marks of different cultures are left on the works. The Chinese version of Cinderella from Lin Lan has the unique ideology of bad people receiving huge punishment, the American version has the unique ideology of minimizing the violence, creating an ideal fantasy for audience and valuing teamwork. What’s more, the two different versions share some similar ideologies as well, including emphasizing the aristocratic elite, pursuing a higher social status and rewarding good people. These ideologies are highly relevant to the culture and can be regarded as an extension of the culture. There are also many symbolic things related to the cultures, such as the bamboo in the Chinese version, and the castle representing the western culture in the Disney version. By analyzing different versions of the tales and the ideologies contained in them, we can have a deeper insight of the different cultures.