

# From Barbie: Analyzing the Interplay Between Film and Society in the Context of Feminist Thought Trend

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### Abstract:

In recent years, with the rise of feminist thought trend on the internet, audiences have been willing to buy tickets for movies with feminist themes, but it has also raised many problems. This paper will analyze the two-way interaction between film and society from the perspectives of film audience and film sociology, by comparing the audience behavior in different cultural backgrounds of China and the United States, to analyze the interaction between feminist themed movies and society.

**Keywords:** feminism, film sociology, film audience

## 1. Introduction

With the development of the times, feminist ideas have gradually spread through the internet, triggering a feminist thought trend, while film, as a medium for cultural dissemination, has also turned its attention to feminist themes, but it has also raised many problems, such as the serious conceptualization and proceduralization in film representation, or the use of women as visual consumption symbols. Barbie doll, a popular toy that swept the world in the 20th century, has since become a cultural symbol of feminism. As a product of social development, the film reflects social life and phenomena that cannot be ignored. The film "Barbie" creates a virtual toy world and conveys current gender social phenomena to the audience, but it also raises the issue of "group unconsciousness" in the context of feminist thought trend.

## 2. Conceptualization of Group Unconsciousness

Unconsciousness is a more comprehensive academic concept, not exclusive to psychology, first mentioned by Plato. In the late 19th century, Le Bon referred to the psychological law of the unity of group spirit that individuals exhibit as "the psychology of group unity without consciousness,"[1] capturing the enormous energy of group unconsciousness, but in the social context of the time, the groups he saw were mostly "ragtag crowds," primarily manifesting their destructive power. [2]In the theory of unconscious psychology, Freud made a more systematic exploration, dividing the human psyche into three layers: consciousness, preconsciousness, and unconsciousness. The unconscious elements refer to things that would never enter the conscious level under normal circumstances. Soviet psychologists started from dialectical

materialism and believed that unconsciousness must be based on the existence or potential existence of consciousness, changing the previous method of interpretation from idealism and to some extent enriching the exploration of unconsciousness.

### 3. Contextualisation of Barbie

Feminism has always been a major issue in gender studies. In essence, feminism is not the result of a one-sided issue, but the result of the participation of all people under the whole cultural system, and the study of feminism opens up a new perspective for sociological theory. [3] Undoubtedly, Barbie is a film based on feminism, which constructs a feminist society that is completely opposite to the real world, catering to a certain feminist trend at the moment, and it has become a social consensus that women shouldn't be subordinate to men and shouldn't be a footnote of power in male society. [4] Thus, in Barbie's world, Barbie is the first sex, while Ken is the second sex. Ken becomes Barbie's vassal in Barbie's world, and unlike males in the real world, he has no occupation or house, and is in dire straits in Barbie's world.

### 4. Socio-cultural interpretation of Barbie

From a sociological point of view, the film is a spin-off of Barbie's IP, which has been the perfect image for all girls since its inception. Barbie breaks down the barriers of the industry, and can be anyone she wants to be, and is part of the male-dominated industry. The film's marketing strategy is also aimed at the dream colour in the hearts of all girls - pink, and triggered a tsunami of "Barbie is everything" pink publicity and the launch of a series of peripheral products, leading the world's fashion trends, capturing the hearts of countless viewers. This is due to the film team's insight into the audience's psychology and the clever use of pink elements.[5] It is reported that the film has been used to promote Barbie as a fashion brand for many years. According to statistics, the female audience of Barbie accounted for 65% in the first weekend, which undoubtedly satisfies the spiritual needs of most women in today's society, and achieves a certain degree of success in the interaction with female audience.

#### 4.1 Interpretation of Barbie Reviews on Chinese Film Criticism Platforms

As a mainstream film discussion platform in China, Douban's samples have high reference value. On Douban, the rating of Barbie is as high as 8.0, with most of the high scores coming from women, most of whose comments

contain ridicule of men's defence breaking after watching the film, and think it is a real feminist film. Only a few of the low-scoring reviews think that Barbie is not a good feminist film, but a consumerist trap that uses feminism to achieve its commercial goals. Looking back at the development of feminism in China, the feminist trend has been formed since the 1980s due to the rise of feminist literature and art. The reason for this is that since the reform and opening up, China's economic and social development has created conditions for the development of feminism, followed by the expansion of Western feminism, and then by the Internet, which has created a space for the exhibition of feminism, making the "echo wall" effect more and more prominent. [6] Tracing back to the origin, Chinese feminism has been influenced by a number of Western feminist genres, so some Western genres or NGOs have brought some negative impacts on feminism in order to expand their influence. Take "Barbie" as an example, some action feminism intends to create confrontation between men and women, using the irrationality of the Internet discourse to release some inflammatory remarks, "men break the defence" has become a high-security word to incite public opinion, so a "war of words" between men and women erupted in the comment section. The comment section erupted into a "war of words" between men and women, provoking sharp contradictions between the sexes. In the Internet economy is increasingly emerging, the idea of feminism has also been more widely spread, more and more women are exposed to the idea of feminism, and "Barbie" is precisely to follow the logic of traffic, through the packaging of feminist persona to attract female consumers, so that it becomes "one of the commodities peddled by consumerism. [7] It can be said that Barbie caters to the current trend of feminism in Chinese society, as Chinese feminist ideology and culture developed from the West is still immature, and there are very few works that explore feminism in China. As far as the film text of Barbie is concerned, it reverses the power subjects of men and women in the real society, and the narrative with women as the main body is not common in China's traditional social system of "male superiority and female inferiority", so Chinese women's desire for their own power is increasingly enhanced along with the dissemination of the Internet, coupled with the overwhelming pink marketing of Barbie, which makes its popularity in China's film industry. This, together with the overwhelmingly pink marketing of Barbie, has made it a hit in the Chinese film market.

#### 4.2 Interpretation of reviews of Barbie on American film review platforms

On IMDB, which is known as Douban in the United

States, the rating of Barbie is only 6.9, which is much lower than the average score of Douban. Contrary to Chinese netizens, from the point of view of the highly praised reviews, American netizens affirmed that Barbie has a certain degree of artistry, but generally believed that Barbie is a representation of feminism through blunt sermons, and therefore thought that the film is just for hype, pandering to the audience through the theme of feminism to achieve its commercial purpose. Historically, the United States was heavily influenced by Christian values, especially Puritanism, which meant that women were in a subordinate position to men, and thus feminism began to germinate. After the War of Independence and the Industrial Revolution, feminism gradually began to rise. Accompanied by the outbreak of the U.S. Civil War and the struggle for women's rights after World War II, the National Organization for Women was established in 1966, and until today, although U.S. women through the struggle to get a considerable amount of power, but the phenomenon of inequality still exists [8], so the U.S. women's need for their own power and status still exists, and the United States has also spawned the discipline of American feminist studies. As a whole, American Feminology aims to improve women's inequality, enhance women's status, examine privileges and discrimination in society, and empower the self as its teaching goal, and focuses on women's current situation and demands in various aspects such as family, work, marriage, personal, legal, and education. On the surface, this seems to be the goal pursued by women's groups, but in reality it is more of a priority topic for white women, or elite white women, and it obscures the real demands of other women's groups, especially those of other ethnic groups. [9] The content of American feminism caters to the expectations of women in Barbie, where women can be anything they want to be, including doctors, lawyers, and presidents, replacing male-dominated professions, but Barbie portrays its female protagonists and most of its characters as white women, ignoring the differences between women of different races. And ignoring the claims between women of different races, as a country with a majority of foreign immigrants and ethnically diverse people, "Barbie" clearly does not focus on the claims of diversity, but rather singularly caters to the outlook of white women. , and as the question posed by a section of American women: why isn't there a regular Barbie?

#### *4.3 Interpretation of views arising from different cultural backgrounds in China and the United States*

Chinese traditional culture advocates collectivism, and in the vast array of film and television works, most of the characters solve problems through collective behaviour,

which is used to show the power of people's unity. Therefore, the awakening of Chinese feminism tends to be a collective awakening, and Chinese women tend to think through a communal rather than an individual consciousness in the social environment. In the context of the prevalence of collectivist culture, Chinese women are mostly looking for a sense of collective identity, while ignoring their individual feelings. Therefore, in a patriarchal society, women have a sense of self-restraint and measure themselves according to the general expectations of society. It is also for this reason that under feminist thinking, Chinese women's "Barbie" Douban discussion shows a kind of ideology of confrontation with men, the most commonly agreed upon sentence is: "Every boy who breaks the defence is an egg in this film." The social culture of the United States advocates individualism, emphasising the existence of the individual, which can be seen in many Hollywood films and television works, so the feminist trend in the United States is manifested as an individual awakening, such as Barbie initially advertised that: a girl can be anything she wants to be, as long as you work hard to achieve it. In Barbie, feminism has evolved into a form of political correctness, with the film emphasising self-centredness and promoting egoism, with the final lines of the film suggesting that girls should fight with men, while for men it is the rhetoric of "Ken is me", which is intended to create a divide between men and women. These egoistic statements are intended to create a divide between men and women, and therefore Chinese women are motivated by the rhetoric of male-female dichotomy, which they tend to follow in the context of a collectivist culture.

## **5. Conclusion**

Women have always been on the weaker side of the patriarchal social oppression for a long time. Feminist film, television and literature should be used as a voice for women, not as a commercial product for profit. Whether in China or the United States, women's social experiences have been traumatic, and the long history of patriarchal oppression has left women on the weaker side of the spectrum, so that the lives they lead today have been made possible by the struggles of countless feminist pioneers. While women's awakening is a good thing, feminism is not about standing up to men, but rather about standing with men in the fight against gender oppression, in the pursuit of equality between men and women, in the overthrow of oppressive gender stereotypes, and in the respect of individual choices as both men and women, from social expectations of men and women's physical appearance to the division of roles between the genders. When looking

at feminism or disadvantaged groups in any dimension, no one is always the beneficiary, so one should focus on the ‘us’ rather than the ‘them’. We need feminism to make self-realisation freer for everyone.

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