

Contrastive Narration in Korean Family Drama

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Abstract. Contrast, as a narrative technique or method, exists widely in TV dramas. Contrast can be divided into two kinds: horizontal comparison, that is, the comparison of positive and negative or contradictory things, which illustrates problems and expresses viewpoints through their respective characteristics; vertical comparison, that is, the comparison of two different aspects of the same thing or the change of the same thing. To show the development and change of things by contrast narrative, explaining the problem and express the point of view. This paper combines three representative Korean family dramas to analyze the use of contrastive techniques in the narrative of Korean family plays.

1. Introduction

Comparison, as a way of thinking to establish the relationship between two things, has a profound philosophical and social foundation. Not only in the real life, but also in the traditional Chinese philosophy and materialist philosophy, comparison has widely existed as a form of contradiction. Contrastive thinking presents different forms when can be applied to different fields. In the field of narrative, comparison is widely used as a narrative technique or method. Robert McGee said: Using comparison or contrast to shape personalities of characters, this is the most basic element of all good storytelling techniques. In the “Chinese Narrative”, the famous American scholar and Professor Pu Andi specially analyzed the contrastive methods in Chinese literary narrative.

Contrastive narrative refers to the comparison of two aspects of different things or the same thing, in order to highlight the characteristics of things, and enhance the expression effect, which is a method to express the author's feelings. Comparison can be divided into two kinds: The lateral comparison, namely the comparison between two things of pros and cons or contradictory, which is to explain the problem through different characteristics and express the viewpoint; The vertical comparison, i.e. the comparison between two different aspects of the same thing or the before and after changes of same thing, which is to explain the problem and express the viewpoint through the development and changes of things.

In order to clarify the viewpoint, this article analyzes the comparative narrative techniques used in the Korean family dramas represented by “Golden Era of Daughter in Law”, “What’s with This Family”, “Everybody Cha-Cha-Cha”.

2. Family comparison

As far as Korean family dramas are concerned, though there is a situation that describes a family of three, the mainstream of Korean family dramas is still mainly based on two or more families’ lives. Comparison methods are widely used in the family background setting. As mentioned above, based on comparison or contrast, basic value judgments or opinions such as happiness or misfortune, kindness or evil can be shown. The following is a specific analysis of the use of the comparison of family settings in the above three family dramas.

2.1 Three families in the “Golden Era of Daughter in Law”

It can be seen from the character structure chart that the narrative of this family drama is unfolded by the three families of Li, Gao and Zhao. Although the primary and secondary relationship between these three families in the drama is clear, there also is a comparative relationship.

The comparison between the Lis and the Zhaos is manifested in the economy and concept. The Lis are an ordinary family who run restaurants, but the Zhaos are a middle-class family. The father in Family Zhao is a retired civil servant and now runs a western restaurant, and the mother runs a singing training class. Their son who has gone to study abroad comes back halfway. In terms of their financial conditions, a family is ordinary and another is a wealthy one; from the perspective of family concept, the Lis is more traditional, and the grandmother in this family is the most authoritative and unquestionable, because a dream of hers can already make the whole family restless. The father also has absolute power in front of his wife, daughter, and son, which is a traditional patriarchal family. However, the family Zhao has shown the opposite state. The mother has power at home, while the father and son only have the right to resist, which is a modern family. The difference between the two families is the main reason for the subsequent conflicts between the two family members.

Although Li and Gao’s families have shown great differences in their economic condition, one is to run small restaurants and the other is to run large hospitals. However, this TV drama emphasizes not the economic difference but the difference in atmosphere between the two families. Although every member of Li’s family live under the power of the grandmother, and every day has a lot of contradictions, the audience can see the inner goodness of each family member and the happiness of this family presented. However, Zhumianpei is rich in material, but because the mother-in-law of the family has driven away the son-in-law that the son likes, and has dissatisfaction with the existing daughter-in-law. The oppressive atmosphere has always existed, and silence is the main melody of the family. The resulting misfortune is very clear. If the family backgrounds of Li and Zhao are to prepare conditions for contradictions, then the family backgrounds of Li and Gao are set to present the author's point of view and express the author's understanding of happiness and misfortune. In addition, the presentation of the family Gao has incorporated tragedy factors into the atmosphere of comedy.

2.2 The family comparison in “Everybody Cha-Cha-Cha”

In this TV series, there are three families of Principal Li’s family, the Widow Shuang’s family, and Luo’s family. However, not only the relationship between the three families is very different from the “Golden Era of Daughter in Law”, but also the narrative effect of three different families is different.

The narrative function of the Widow Shuang’s family and Luo’s family setting is to provide the basis and foundation for the character shaping of Jiang Naying and Han Zhenyu. Only family differences can lead to differences in personality and concept of two people and lead to contradictions. In essence, the comparison in these two family’s relationships is weak, which is more like a kind of analogy relationship, since both families can be said to be a happy family.

The comparison setting between the Principal Li’s family and the Widow Shuang’s family, not only provide a basis and foundation for the different concept between Han Zhenjing’s and Principal Li’s family, increas the marital resistance of Han Zhenjing and Li Han, but also has an aesthetic function. The eldership difference between the Principal Li’s family and the Widow Shuang’s family results in the difference between the two families formed, one is the traditional patriarchy, and the other one can be said that family members are equal to each other.

The comparison of the families in the three TV dramas is strong or weak, which mainly result by the difference between the narrative model and the theme adopted by the three family dramas. Such differences are the fundamentals that make up the rich and varied of Korean family drama.

3. Character comparison

When it comes to the contrast in narrative, the comparison of character formation is a common type, and comparison is widely used as a method shape character. The use of comparison techniques to

shape characters is found in all narrative works from the past to the present. From Aesop's Fables to Grimm's Fairy Tales, from Shakespeare to Guan Hanqing, comparative narrative techniques are widely used. Not only the literary narrative, but also the narrative of film and television. Based on the three family dramas of “Golden Era of Daughter in Law”, “What’s with This Family” and “Everybody Cha-Cha-Cha”, this paper analysis the comparative narration of characters in Korean family dramas.

3.1 The comparison of characters in the “Golden Era of Daughter in Law”

In this TV series, the comparison of mother-in-law in the family Li and family Gao is very representative, and this comparison has been strengthened and highlighted by the writer and the director. In terms of identity, one of the two is Wu Xiangxin's daughter-in-law, and the other is Wu Xiangxin's daughter. However, Wu Xiangxin 's attitude towards the two women is quite opposite, showing a very big difference of the corresponding relationship in real life. For the daughter-in-law, Wu Xiangxin said that she'd never tried to forgive her, and criticized her in almost every moment. But before when Wu Xiangxin was about to die, she still remembered her daughter-in-law, worried that she could not take good care of other people, and the daughter-in-law also said that she and her mother-in-law shared lifetime for 40 years, her mother-in-law is like her mother. However, for her daughter, Wu Xiangxin did not express a little common concern and love, but always shown criticized and denied. She would not even say a word of criticism in common days. The reason why this attitude is presented, in the 27th minute of episode 49, Wu Xiangxin explained the reason in the hospital bed: “The daughter-in-law should not behaviors like that, but should learn to love others, learn to accept others, integrate into another family and understand them, live together.” Not only is the grandmother talking, but the screenwriter tells his own value judgment by the grandmother's mouth, and also clearly expresses the theme of this family drama “What is the era of daughter-in-law?”

3.2 The comparison of characters in “Everybody Cha-Cha-Cha”

The special relationship between the characters appearing in this TV drama is the relationship between Han Zhenjing and Han Shuxian. The reason is that they are sister, but love with a man at the same time, and this kind of love is occurred with the three are all unaware of it. This kind of relationship is rare in other TV series. As other TV dramas like “The Princesses Qi in the gossip”, one of the sisters entered into a sister’s competition with knowing exactly who the other sister's boyfriend is. It is because the two sisters love a man at the same time that the image of the two has a comparison. This comparison is both the enhanced and outstanding content of the writer and the director, as well as the content of the audience's concern. Han Shuxian is a good girl, which is obedient, sensible, and has a more positive image. Han Zhenjing is arrogant and supreme, and presents a negative image, but she has a kind of openness and persistence that Han Shuxian does not have, especially for her own love. Here, the purpose of the writer and the director to present these two images is multi-layered. One is to shape the image through contrast, the other is to strengthen the contradiction between the two, and the third is to present a different aesthetic.

3.3 Comparison of characters in “What’s with This Family”

The comparison of the characters involved in the above two TV series is lateral comparison. There are more vertical comparisons in the “What’s with This Family”, mainly the comparison between two different images of the same person. Here taking the case of Wen Taizhu as an example. At the beginning of this TV series, he was a manager and his image were strong and cold. At the end of this TV series, he is a father, the image is weak and warm. The purpose of this comparison is to highlight the theme of love.

4. Character relationship comparison

If the narrative function of family contrast is to provide a social background for character shaping or to reflect the theme through family contrast, character comparison is an important method to strengthen the character image. Then the comparison of character relationship has two functions, one

is to serve for the theme, and the other is to serve for presence of different levels of aesthetic objects. If the comparison of characters can be directly presented through audiovisual language, then the comparison of family contrast and character relationship requires more subjective participation of the audience. The following three family dramas are used to analyze the comparative forms of the relationship between the characters involved and their narrative and aesthetic functions.

4.1 The comparison of the characters relationship in the “Golden Era of Daughter in Law”

This TV series is taking about three families, which is also about three pairs of lovers or couples. Zhao Meizhen and Li Fushui, Zhao Renyu and Li Funan, Gao Junming and Che Xiuxian have three different forms of love relationship for lovers or couples. Because Li Fushui, Zhao Renyu, and Gao Junming have different growth backgrounds, one is in a traditional family, and one is in a modern family, and the other one in a wealthy but lacking warm family background, which makes the three people's loves show different situations. The love between Zhao Meizhen and Li Fushui belongs to the kinds of traditional love. Men are strong and have power, women are weak and need to be care. Zhao Renyu and Li Funan's love is the opposite. Zhao Renyu is in an active and weak position in love while Li Funan is the one being pursued. Talking to Gao Junming and Che Xiuxian, there is no love between them because it is a typical triangular relationship. A TV series, three pairs of lovers, three different kinds of love, which presents the audience with three different aesthetics.

4.2 Comparison of the relationship between characters in “What’s with This Family”

This TV series is taking the Che Shunfeng family as the core of the narrative, with a typical star-shaped model formed by four families with three children as a bridge. The love of the three children presents three different conditions. The love of the eldest daughter, the love of the second son, the love of the younger son, although these three pairs of love belong to the kinds of triangle love, the degree of love is different. The love of the second son, is the love that the third party has the deepest involvement. For the love of the second son, the triangle relationship is the narrative focus, but for the love of the eldest daughter, the existence of the lawyer is only to make the eldest daughter's past description clearer, so that the father's lawsuit against the three children is more tortuous. Love is not the main content. In addition, the love modality of the three pairs of lovers is also diverse. The love of the eldest daughter is a typical relationship of from enemy to lover, which started from mutual exclusion to mutual understanding, and then to love; The second son love is more like unrequited love; The younger son love is more euphemistic, although two people like each other, but there is no clear love.

Generally speaking, contrastive narrative is often used with the multi-line narrative. Contrastive narrative is not only an important method to express the theme and shape the characters, but also an important means to complicate and refine the plot of Korean family dramas.

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