

# An Analysis of the Viewing Demand of Chinese Audience from the Narrative Strategy: Take the Well-Received Television Series in China from 2015 to 2018 as an Example

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## ABSTRACT

Although with over billions of people China has a huge TV series market, there are only few TV series currently that can leave a good impression on the audience. The scarcity of quality and the mediocrity of quality have become common problems in the moment. In this context, the narrative strategy with strong practical significance becomes a popular research object. This paper analyzed the narrative strategies of three television dramas with high reputation in China between 2015 to 2018 through a detailed content analysis and found that the successful TV series have some features in common and these features may contribute to the high score of these TV series.

**Keywords:** narrative strategy, Chinese TV series, Douban, audiences' reference

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, television art is a rising industry, becoming an indispensable part of millions of audiences. In 2018, 323 TV series were produced and distributed nationwide, with a total of 13,700 episodes. The domestic investment in TV dramas was 24.285 billion yuan, and domestic sales reached 26.095 billion yuan. China has become a veritable producer and consumer of TV dramas.[1] Because of the increasingly rich experience of watching television series, Chinese audiences are watching current television series with strict and critical standards. In this trend, Chinese television series are continuously developing. This paper will analyze the narrative strategies, namely, narrative perspective and character of three Chinese TV series and summarize their characteristics and aims to find out their commonalities and narrative characteristics. This paper mainly uses the content analysis method. In order to reveal the key to the success of TV series, the author selected the most successful TV series recently in China. These TV series attracted over 10,000 people in 2015-2018 and their scores in the Douban list (one of the most important film scoring sites in China) higher are than 8.5 (out of ten). This paper hopes to enlighten the narrative structure of Chinese TV series in the future.

## 2. INFORMATION ABOUT THE TELEVISION SERIES

A brief introduction of the selected series is shown in the table 1.

**Table 1** The brief introduction of four series

Name	Year	Score in Douban	Theme
Like a flowing river	2018	8.8 /10	contemporary
Day and night	2017	9.0/10	Crime
Nirvana in fire	2015	9.3/10	Revenge, ancient

## 3. ANALYZE FROM TWO NARRATIVE STRATEGIGES

### 3.1 Narrative perspective

The perspective is a specific angle in the narrative language to observe and tell the story content. The same events may have different appearances from different perspectives, and they may have different meanings in different people's eyes. The perspective mentioned here is actually the focus that Genette mentioned in Narrative Discourse. He divides the focus into three categories. The first is zero focus. The narrator knows more than anyone else, that is, the omnipotent perspective. The second is the

internal focus, that is, the narrator is equal to the character [1]. We understand the world through the perspective of the protagonist. This perspective can be changed or fixed during the expansion of the story. The third category is the external focus that the narrator knows as much as the audience. The secret or truth behind the Protagonist is revealed merely by the development of the plot. Different narrative perspectives can create different events or sharp people with different characteristics. According to Li (2016), successful TV series often contain various narrative perspectives [2].

*Nirvana in Fire* as a successful TV series, has achieved a flexible switch from the perspective, most of the time using the inner focus narrative, but the perspective of the characters is flexible, sometimes is the hero's point of view, sometimes is the witness's perspective. At the beginning of the TV series, we presented Mei Changsu who woke up from the illness. The audience did not know what happened and did not know what Mei Changsu was going to do next, but as the story progressed, Mei Changsu passed his language and actions slowly revealed his plans to us. The audience used the feelings and consciousness of Mei Changsu to know everything from his perspectives of sight, hearing and action. Because of the narrative of the protagonist's intrinsic focus, the audience naturally has a special sense of intimacy and authenticity to look at Mei Changsu.

*Like a flowing river* takes the character as the entry point of the story and presents the grand history of reform and opening up with the fate of the ordinary small person in the progress of the times and the rough experience. Its success lies in the powerful role of ordinary people in the era of economic transformation. Song Yunhui, Lei Dongbao and Yang Xun are metaphorized the attempted state-owned economy, collective economy and individual economy, respectively. They dare to try and work hard in the adjustment of national policies. Their tenacious efforts represent the mentality of a generation. The conflicts of interest between the lower class and government leaders in the reform of state-owned enterprises, the difficulties in the reform of the rural collective ownership economy, and the confusion of identity after the emergence of the individual economy are all related to each other in the historical stories of the 1980s. Therefore, anxiety and sadness in *Like a flowing river* are deeply expressed.

### **3.2 Character**

Characterization is the sum of the qualities of people we can observe. The characters in TV series mainly rely on dramatic plots. The advancement of dramatic plot is the primary way for TV series to show the external characteristics of characters and reveal the character essence and desire and motivation of characters [3].

Taking *Nirvana in Fire* as an example, Mei Changsu, as the soul of the whole drama, has a complicated relationship. The people around Mei Changsu can be basically divided into two categories: those who help him and those who hinder him. In *Nirvana in Fire*, the function

setting of Princess Nihuang, Prince Jing, and his bodyguard Feiliu is to help the protagonist to avenge the vengeance, while Prince Yu, Xie Yu, Xia Jiang and others have set the obstacles on the way forward. Such a setting seems simple but has a special effect in accommodating the plot and the richness of the character. Through simple settings, a large number of characters can be brought close to the narrative. Each character can produce different plots but be unified in simple function settings. The relationship between the characters is not chaotic, and the storyline is enriched.

The importance of character portrayal is prominent in *Like a Flowing River*. Among the many characters, the characters of Song Yunhui, Lei Dongbao and Yang Xun are particularly outstanding. They are rural youths who have grown up from the bottom, but because of the different family environment and growth experience, their personalities have their own characteristics. As a scholar, Song Yunhui's multiple personalities are expressed by a large number of facts and details. The previous episodes describe Song Yunhui with a lot of details, and in the subsequent plots, the facts are used to prove the characters in detail. Lei Dongbao's role is shaped by layers, but also a prominent one. The contrast between its advantages and disadvantages highlights Lei Dongbao's discouraged and responsible side, and also magnifies his ruthless shortcomings, making the audience feel that the characters are livelier and fuller. In addition, the drama accurately outlines a pioneer of reform from the perspective of a flat view. He is a resolute village cadre in front of the villagers. After returning to the family, he is a good son, a good husband and a good son-in-law, balancing his heroic image and civilian image. The role of Yang Xun is often used for side descriptions. Starting from the observations and views of the people around, Yang Xun, who played late in the series, even if there is no direct narrative lens in the early stage, the clever and clever character is enough persuasive, and the image of dare to fight has already stood in the hearts of the audience. Furthermore, the female characters in the play are equally exciting. Characters do not exist for existence. Their personality traits have a profound impact on the protagonist, making the three protagonists more persuasive in the character behavior logic of the key plot. Take Song Yunping as an example. Her character is kind and tough, and she is soft and soft. Although she preserves the thoughts of the old times but is not bound by her thoughts, her mature thoughts can always point her husband Lei Dongbao and his younger brother Song Yunhui at a critical moment. Becoming the armor of the two strong men drives the development of the story. Its independent image has become a representative and breakthrough for women in the new era, and its era significance is complete and understandable. At the same time, the character of each character in the play is not flat, and it is not static. Lei Dongbao, who was arrogant because of his achievements, went to jail for bribing the county magistrate with a huge sum of money. The old branch secretary who made great contributions to Xiaoleijia Village later committed suicide by being investigated for corruption and had a strong sense

of professionalism. The county party secretary of responsibility is also corrupt and so on. These unexpected plots have broken the rigid stereotypes of the people of the due diligence cadres and revealed the complexity of human nature.

Day and Night represents a large number of characters, each of whom has a clear face, distinctive personality and high discrimination. When the character is shaping the character, it starts from three aspects: character, emotion and feeling. The main characters in the play are set up around Guan Hongfeng, such as his brother Guan Hongyu, colleagues Zhou Xun, Liu Changyong, Gao Yanan, apprentice Zhou Shutong, criminal Ye Fangzhou. These characters are intricate and mutual Implicated, for instance, Liu Changyong and Zhou Shutong are fathers and daughters, Guan Hongyu and Gao Yanan are lovers, Zhou Shutong and Ye Fangzhou used to be lovers. Of course, the most important relationship in all of these relationships is the relationship between Guan Hongfeng and Guan Hongyu, the twin brothers. Their affection is an important driving force for narrative. On the other hand, the characters of Day and Night are set up as two closely related, mirrored characters - the twin brothers who are difficult to distinguish between each other. The sign of their conversion is the night. As the story develops, characters continue to grow, and their relationships change. For example, after Guan Hongyu ended the "kidnapping case", he saw that the innocent person died and the weak was arrested. He began to study the case seriously, and when Dong Gan was killed, he was able to solve the case independently. At the beginning, my brother was taking care of his younger brother, but later, their roles were slowly exchanged. In the 28-29 episode, the younger brother went deep into the snow and rescued the trapped brother. Guan Hongyu, who was originally impulsive and violent, became more and more calm and calm like his brother, and Guan Hongfeng, who started the spectacle, became a person with too many secrets and difficulty distinguishing between good and evil. In fact, we are increasingly aware that Guan Hongfeng is the night, and the transparent and playful Guan Hongyu is just a day. In the last episode, Guan Hongfeng decided to face the inner darkness. In the development of the two characters, the party that originally represented the darkness became brighter and brighter, but the brighter side became darker and darker. At the same time, they gradually became one and hard to divide each other. The drama also portrayed a group of police figures who are both righteous and evil. They have conscience and personality defects, such as Zhou Xun, the captain of office politics and temper, bureaucratic style, Liu Changyong, the deputy captain of the world, and Zhou Shutong, a rapidly growing graduate student. Gao Yanan, a forensic and self-sufficient forensic doctor, is a model of criminal police who workday and night and work hard. We witnessed this spirit and consciousness in the events of Zhou Xun, Guan Hongfeng, Lin Jiayin and others in the face of death and Liu Changyong's dereliction of duty. It is worth mentioning that Guan Hongfeng, the detective of the "Sherlock Holmes" in the play, is ambiguous in his identity as both a

"just police" and a "hypocritical bastard". He is both a brave detective and a brilliant criminal, both a victim and a victim. The framers are full of emotions and cold and ruthless. Although his ability to detect cases is excellent, he has heavy stains and evidences. His contradictions and unpredictability are a complex portrayal of human nature, which makes the whole drama more in the shaping of characters vivid and fascinating.

#### **4. RESULT OF THE ANALYSIS**

The plot construction of TV series is an important component of TV series' narration. As TV series are long-length narrations with dozens of episodes, they must rely on interesting plots to constantly attract the audience's attention, so as to obtain a high audience rating [4]. From the analysis, we can find that although these three high-scoring TV dramas have different themes. They all have their own characteristics and commonalities in narrative perspective, and character. From the perspective of narration, taking Like a following river and Nirvana of Fire as examples, both take characters as the entry point of the story, which are different from each other. The former is based on different characters, while in the latter, Mei Changsu, as the first leading role in the whole drama, controls the whole plot with strategic layout and strategy, and every move of the main characters is within the calculation, and all the roles of light and dark around are left to it. This design of the leading role's "omniscient and omnipresent" effectively promotes the fluency of narration [5]. However, through these two examples, it is not difficult to find that the TV series can better express the story by taking the characters as the narrative points, so that the audience can have a sense of natural integration into the story. In terms of the shaping of characters, no matter which TV series, each character can elicit the corresponding story background with the corresponding character color and image. The characters in the play are not flat, but with rich emotions and their own value orientation. Although the relationship between the characters is complicated, it is not confusing and the variety of characters enrich the story, in turn.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

As a result, the reasons for the high scores of TV series are inseparable from their narrative strategies. Audiences are also inclined to the TV shows with more characteristics in narrative structure, character setting and narrative content than the others. In recent years, China's TV drama industry has developed rapidly. Every year, there are several TV dramas with much public praise and good reputation. However, the supply of good TV dramas obviously cannot meet the demand of the audience due to the huge film and TV market in China. When a TV show hits a peak, many similar shows emerge subsequently by copying the successful one. There is a lack of creators in the Chinese

Market. The reason for that may attribute to the lack of systemically instruction of drama writing. According to Li (2016), the audience is not only TV viewers, or a story of hunting and splicing [2]. Therefore, creators should start from the audience, study the audience's psychology, find the resonance point that the audience can accept, and follow the typology, which can suture the mainstream consciousness, market logic and mass culture, to create effective narrative strategy, give play to their own advantages, grasp the audience and conquer the audience.

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