The Atypical Villain: A Study of the Complexity of Constructing the Villainous Image in the Film and Television Drama of Crime Crackdown

Han Yu
Shanxi University
Corresponding author E-mail: 2286172144@qq.com

Abstract: Usually, the villain in films and television dramas has to become embedded in the minds of human beings in order to complete the rivalry with the positive characters in the ups and downs of the plot. As a special medium, films and television dramas can subconsciously transmit their underlying values to the audience. Therefore, how to portray the villains with good and evil intertwined to achieve the narrative effect while strictly abiding by the red line of ethics and morality to prevent the transmission of bad values is of vital importance. This paper takes the villain Gao Qiqiang in the film and television drama The Knockout as an example, analyzes the text based on the Propp narrative theory, explores the complexity of its image construction, and summarizes thirty one functions of the film and television drama of Crime Crackdown, with a view to providing reference for the shaping of the image of the villain in film and television dramas.

Key Words: Propp narrative theory; films and television dramas on the subject of crime crackdown; image construction

1 Introduction

As China's rule of law process continues to deepen and the socialist rule of law country has gradually been built, a number of films and television dramas on the subject of crime crackdown flooded into the market, meanwhile, it impresses the audience with its full-bodied characters, confusing cases and profound details. The villain, who is supposed to represent "evil" in the drama, however, it has a strong complexity and is wrapped in "true love" and "goodness" at the same time. Therefore, like positive characters, they often reach the hearts of people and are even loved by the audience. This particular communication phenomenon breaks the audience's perceptions and attitudes towards villainous characters in the past. As a result, the author proposed these questions: How can such villains present the good side of "true love" and "friendship" while taking "evil" as their main characteristic, making them very intricate and arousing special emotions in the audience? Does it blur the audience's perception of good and evil? This paper develops a study based on this issue.

2 Literature Review

2.1 A review of image construction research

The study of constructed image views has a long history and involves several disciplines. In the domain of semiotics, the American sociologist Goffman proposed the famous Dramaturgical Theory in Self-Presentation of Everyday Life, which compares life to a play in which individuals or groups perform to construct a desired image of themselves in the minds of others. In social life, there are many fields that need to shape and manage images, for example, a state needs to build an image for external communication, each city has its own unique image characteristics, specific professional groups (doctors, teachers, police officers, etc.) need to manage their image to the outside world, and individuals have to constantly maintain the image they want to present to the outside world, which has been much studied. This phenomenon has attracted the attention of the academic community, which uses the portrayal of various characters as a means to convey the ideas behind them.

In Study on the Construction and Changes of the image of Chinese people in Western films and TV Dramas, Huang Ju, in 2020 pointed out the Western political demands and cultural export strategies behind from the initial demonization of the Chinese image in Western films and TV dramas, to the integration of a large number of Eastern elements to make the Chinese image gradually three-dimensional. In 2021, Tu Liuyu, in The Construction and Imbalance of Urban Women's Image in Female Narrative Urban Drama - Take ‘Nothing But Thirty’ as an Example, specifically analyzes how the drama constructs the female image too perfectly, thus structures and objectifies women to a certain extent. The phenomenon leads to an implicit attachment to men which reflects the imbalance of the female narrative in this play. Research dedicated to the image of villains. In his master's degree thesis in 2021, A Study on the Shaping of Villainous Characters in Pixar's Animated Films, Liu Ming summarized the positioning, types, characteristics, and significance of villainous characters in animated films, and compared them with those in live-action films. Finally, he proposes several suggestions for the creation of Chinese animated films, such as breaking the single formula of "ugly" villains, focusing on the creative expression of villains' behavioral motives, and promoting the development of all-ages animated films. In 2020, in an analysis of the villain image in the The Avengers film series, Zhu Yakun particularly proposed the construction of the villain image through detailed portrayal and complete narrative, and pointed out that the villain possesses a powerful dramatic function and contains unique narrative charm and aesthetic value.

2.2 Review of Vladimir Propp’s Narrative Theory research

In 1928, Propp's Story Morphology was published, proposing the famous "31 functional items" theory, which argues that the characters and the plot are not the basic units in a story, but the functions carried by the characters and the plot are the basic structure of its composition. In 1996, Li Yang introduced Propp's theory of structural function in his doctoral dissertation,

Analysis of the Structural Form of Chinese Folk Tales, and analyzed 50 Chinese folk tales to arrive at a common structure for China's indigenous stories. In 2014, Deng Miao explored the significance and shortcomings of Propp's research in his article From Story Morphology to Storytelling - The Meaning, Dilemma and Way Out of Propp's Storytelling Theory and proposed to shift the research from story morphology to the study of storytelling by establishing a holistic, humanistic theory of storytelling grounded in specific folktales. In this theoretical background, Chinese scholar Lu Puling analyzes the relationship between character and structure, action and identity in The Inspirational Significance of Propp's Functional Theory for Narrative Character Studies, and then draws the inspirational significance of Propp's functional theory for character studies from these three aspects.

Not only applicable to the analysis of literary works and the study of folklore, Propp's narrative theory also has a strong overview of the plotting patterns of film and television works. In 2012, Zhang Chunlei, inspired by Propp's theory, creatively summarized six character roles and 13 functions of spy dramas in Analysis on popular spy dramas from the perspective of Propp's role-structure. In 2018, Rong Yu and Tang Haidong, in The Narrative Characteristics of "Empresses in the Palace" from Propp's Story Morphology Narrative Theory, divided Empresses in the Palace into three major sections: fighting with Consort Hua, fighting with the Empress, fighting with the Emperor. Selecting the section of "fighting with the Empress" as a typical representative to bring the characters in the drama into Propp's narrative role theory model and analyze its narrative structure, character role function and narrative mode.

In summary, there are few studies in the academic field that analyze the construction of specific villain images in film and television dramas using Propp's narrative theory as a framework. Therefore, this paper will analyze the construction techniques and characteristics of complex villainous images in film and television dramas through the research method of textual analysis and based on Propp's research results. It also supplements the limitations of Propp's theory in the postmodern context, which helps to enrich the theory of image construction and makes suggestions for the image building of film and television dramas.

3 A study on the shaping of the character "Gao Qiqiang" in The Knockout

The characterization of "Gao Qiqiang" in The Knockout breaks the pattern of the characterization of previous film and television dramas on the subject of crime crackdown, and his life trajectory and emotional experiences give the character a vivid and palpable side, which makes the audience empathize with the plot of the battle between black and white, and to a certain extent weakens and dissolves the dichotomy of the enemy camp. Therefore, "Gao Qiqiang" in The Knockout was chosen for analysis.

3.1 Identity shift based on image and motivation

According to the author's rough statistics, there are nearly 80 roles appearing in The Knockout, which also have their own names and contributing to the development of the plot. By analyzing the role functions of the characters one by one, it is found that none of them are separated from

the role and narrative functions delineated by Propp, in different storylines, the characters' roles only shift accordingly to the plot. Gao Qiqiang is a typical example of the strong complexity of the character due to the change of role, which leads to a violent confrontation between the "good and evil concepts" within the character. In the following section, we will consider Gao Qiqiang as the main character of the story through a typical episode, and systematically analyze his complex good and evil shaping.

In the play, Gao Qisheng, the brother of Gao Qiqiang, wants to open a personal handy phone store, but needs twenty-five thousand yuan. Gao Qiqiang has to borrow money from Tang Xiaolong and Tang Xiaohu, thus learns that as long as he helps Bai Jiangbo to collect debts and beats Xu Lei who owes money, then he can get a benefit of 20,000 yuan. Gao Qiqiang wants to refuse, but his brother does not want to give up the opportunity to open a store to earn money, so he decides to help Bai Jiangbo. After Tang Xiaolong's inquiry, Gao Qiqiang learns that Xu Lei and his friends are electro-fishing in the river. he wants to negotiate with Xu Lei first, however, because Gao Qiqiang pees unintentionally pouring on the electric fish generator by the river, Xu Lei is electrocuted to death. Gao Qiqiang is afraid, wipes off his fingerprints, and flees the scene with the Tang brothers. Although it is an unintentional act, the accidental completion of Bai Jiangbo's task makes him obtain 20,000 yuan of start-up funds to open a store.

In this incident, the role of Gao Qiqiang is transformed from "hero" to "villain"(As Table 1 and Table 2), but the "crime" is committed to "respond" to the needs of the "princess". Behind his atrocities, which represent "evil", is the desire to help his brother fulfill his dream, change the poor status of the Gao family and bring his younger siblings a better life. Behind his atrocities, which represents "evil", is the desire to help his brother fulfill his dream, to change the poor status of the Gao family and to bring his younger siblings a better life. His "evil deeds" are overlaid with love and care for his family. The transformation of his role, motivated by "goodness", has created a multi-dimensional villain image.

Table 1 The episode before Gao Qiqiang gets 20,000 yuan

Narrative Role	Gao Qiqiang accidentally killed Xu Lei in identity advancement period.
Villain	The dilemma of Gao Qiqiang's own poor economic situation; Xu Lei (The money owed to Bai Jiangbo is not returned); Gao Qisheng (Insists on opening a personal handy phone store but lacks of money)
donor	Bai Jiangbo（Promises to give 20,000 yuan if anyone beats up Xu Lei）
helper	Tang Xiaolong, Tang Xiaohu（Help Gao Qiqiang to complete the accidental killing）
princess	Gao Qisheng（Gao Qiqiang raises money to help his brother open a store）
dispatcher	Tang Xiaolong, Tang Xiaohu（Use Gao Qisheng's pretend mentality to force Gao Qisheng to find Xu Lei）
hero	Gao Qiqiang（Has to go to Xu Lei to get the money）
False hero	Bai Jiangbo（Pretends that it is just to collect the debt, but in reality it is to suppress his rival Xu Jiang）

Table 2 The episode during Gao Qiqiang gets 20,000 yuan

Narrative Role	Gao Qiqiang accidentally kills Xu Lei in identity advancement period. Corresponding characters
Villain	Gao Qiqiang (To get 20,000 yuan, accidentally kills Xu Lei)
donor	Bai Jiangbo (gives Gao Qiqiang 20000 yuan)
helper	Tang Xiaolong, Tang Xiaohu（help Gao Qiqiang open the store)
princess	Gao Qisheng (Gao Qiqiang gets the money, successfully helps his brother open the store)
dispatcher	Gao Qisheng (Gao Qiqiang has to raise money because of his brother)
hero	Gao Qiqiang
False hero	Tang Xiaolong, Tang Xiaohu

3.2 Breakthrough the traditional role, shaping three-dimensional image

From the way Propp named his characters, we can see that the "hero" and "princess" symbolize eternal justice, while the "victim" is the representative of the evil forces. It is obvious that Gao Qiqiang is the "victim" and An Xin is the "hero" of the story in The Knockout. The end is definitely in the hero's continuous efforts to capture the culprits so that they are duly punished. This plot logic would have been in line with the norms of ethics and morality, but many spectators unexpectedly showed sympathy and pity for Gao Qiqiang. To a certain degree, it reflects the partial limitation of Propp's narrative theory, which is detached from the specific narrative point of the macro-narrative universe of the story.

According to the concept of "narrative transmission" proposed by American psychologists Green and Brock, the storyteller transmits cognitions, emotions, and attitudes into the narrative world and eventually reaches the audience, the audience then changes their original perceptions and attitudes in the macro-narrative created by the narrator. In the narrator's strong narrative implication that is the tendency of character building, the audience generates an emotional experience of the story image.

The image of Gao Qiang is portrayed in the overall narrative universe. On the one hand, he is a greedy man who has built his business empire by all means and has no regard for the lives of innocent people. On the other hand, he is also a gentle husband, a loving father, and keeps his own boundaries. He is always smiling when facing his wife and never passes on his bad moods in business to Chen Shuting. When Gao Qisheng goes home to report to himself the interests of Zhong Asi, Bald Yong and others, he instructs his brother to wait for his wife to leave and then talk about it, so that she will not worry; Treating Lao Mo's daughter Huang Yao like his own daughter, when Huang Yao is kidnapped to the rooftop, he jumps over to save her covered in blood, trying to exchange his life for his daughter's safety; He strictly controls the business of his men, sternly prohibits the drug trafficking activities carried out by his brother and Tang Xiaolong, and explicitly forbids the Gao family from accessing drugs; Even his initial motivation towards crime is to support his brother to open a Personal Handy Phone store and realize his dream. Such a narrative mixes some of the qualities of a "hero" into his main image of a "victimizer", making his image more fleshed out from a symbolic physical attribute.

"The essence of man is not an abstraction inherent in a single person; in its reality, it is the sum of all social relations of that person." From a macro perspective, Gao Qiqiang is not a pure, stereotypical good guy or bad guy, but an addition of all his surroundings and social relationships,

making the image intertwined with good and evil, contradictory and complex.

3.3 Break the role perception and innovate the narrative function

According to Propp, although there is a wide variety of stories with many characters and different plots, they cannot be separated from a fixed narrative paradigm, and the number of their "functions" is very limited. Through analyzing this particular genre of crackdown on gang crimes drama, The Knockout, this paper changes Propp's study ideas that centered on positive roles, centering on the villain, Gao Qiqiang. Likewise summarize the following 31 main functions of crackdown on gang crimes drama:

Table 3 31 main functions of crackdown on gang crimes drama

Function	Corresponding episodes
1 Breaking the balance	Tang Xiaolong and Tang Xiaohu ask Gao Qiqiang to change the location of his fish stall, breaking the balance of Gao Qiqiang's original life.
2 Against	Gao Qiqiang tries to resist the unfair treatment of the Tang brothers, but ultimately fails to enter the detention facility.
3 First encounter with the chance	Gao Qiqiang meets policeman An Xin and Li Xiang, and uses them as his own contacts, changing people's attitudes towards him.
4 Generating desire	His brother wants to open a personal handy phone store. In order to help him, Gao Qiqiang begins to generate the desire to make money.
5 Accidents	Accidents usually transform thought-level desires into actual action, forcing the good man to take the path of crime. Gao Qiqiang accidentally kills Xu Lei and is drawn into the vortex of greed.
6 Initially encountered obstacles	He starts to fall into Xu Jiang's revenge trap and struggles with him.
7 First show of force	Demonstrates competence and success in the first struggle.
8 Rescue	To save Tang Xiaohu in the hands of Xu Jiang, promises to work for him.
9 Love	Gao Qiqiang meets Chen Shuting by chance during an action, and gradually develops a love affair in the later episodes.
10 Emancipate	Gains Chen Shuting's trust, obtain evidence of Xu Jiang's crime and defeat him.
11 Recruiting helpers	When Lao Mo is just released from prison and was confused, Gao Qiqiang offers him a favor and recruited him as own helper.
12 Building a network	Gao Qiqiang uses Chen Shuting's relationship to recognize Uncle Tai as his godfather.
13 Bribe	Begins bribing government leaders for his own benefit.
14 Compete	When he is the manager of Construction Group, he fought against Cheng Cheng for power and eventually won.
15 Start a feud	In Mang Village, struggles with Li Youtian and others, eventually feuding.
16 Revenge	Through the help of Lao Mo, take revenge on Cheng Cheng and the people of Mang Village.
17 Be Suspected	Suspected by Uncle Tai because the Mang Village project is blocked.

18 Threatened	Chen Shuting's son Xiao Chen is kidnapped as a hostage for his own sake.
19 Be scapegoat	Trapped by Cheng Cheng, Zhang Xiaoqing's body is found in Jian Gong Group's car, Gao Qiqiang is arrested for questioning.
20 Integrated Team	As Tang Xiaolong is released from the prison, Gao Qiqiang completes the formation of the team and asks the team to further study in business school.
21 Difficulties	Gao Qiqiang learns that his brother is presiding the sale of drugs, and the police are tracking this matter.
22 Slaughter	To save his brother from being discovered by the police for drug trafficking, he kills everyone on the drug trafficking branch.
23 Self-Insurance	In order to prevent being implicated by Li Youtian's surrender, he asks Lao Mo to kill Li Youtian.
24 Preserve Brothers	The police orders to arrest Lao Mo and Gao Qisheng, Gao Qiqiang cooperates with Zhao Lidong to save them.
25 Loss	Gao Qiqiang grieves after his brother's death.
26 Challenge	Tang Xiaohu is arrested by the police, Gao Qiqiang publicly calls out with the police through the media.
27 Changes	As Gao Qiqiang's power gets bigger and bigger, more and more people work for him, and some of them cause trouble for him
28 Plot	He opens nursing homes and kindergartens in the name of public welfare, and enlists public officials for his own use
29 Go downhill	With the police's continued efforts to fight crime and evil, Gao Qiqiang's life begins to go downhill, with constant changes and evil deeds being revealed one by one.
30 Betrayed	Xiaochen and Huang Yao are willing to be witnesses and provide evidence to report Gao Qiqiang.
31 Trial	Gao Qiqiang's evil deeds are made public and finally judged by the law.

According to this table, we can see the ups and downs of Gao Qiqiang's life, driven by his own desires and forced by the interests of the times, he goes from a good and law-abiding person to a man who could not turn back on the wrong road. The villainous figure of Gao Qiqiang implies a variety of functions. Analyzing them specifically, it also has the function of motivating kindness, and breaks the traditional villain image function model, making it a community where good and evil intermingle.

4 Consider the construction of the villain's image based on the audience's attitude towards Gao Qiqiang

The famous American novel theorist Forster divided characters into two categories: "flat" and "round", and "round characters" are mostly used to refer to multi-faceted and smooth characters, and Gao Qiqiang is a representative of "round characters". In this drama, the image of Gao Qiqiang is undoubtedly successful, attracting many viewers to discuss and recreate it. Various clip videos are spreading virally on the Internet, thus triggering thoughts on the construction of the villain's image.

4.1 Strictly observe the line of morality and prevent the spread of negative values

As a special medium of communication, film and television dramas can subconsciously transmit their contents, culture and values to the audience. As mentioned above, the audience is immersed in the narrative universe constructed by the film and drama, and easily empathizes with Gao Qiqiang, bringing themselves into his life trajectory and experiencing his humiliation, helplessness, and urgency. Even if he used extreme means to become a gang leader at a later stage, people are mostly excited about him. But life's misfortunes are not the reason for crime, The Knockout not only has Gao Qiqiang, but also has An Xin who tracks down the truth twenty years, Li Xiang who circles the dark forces in his own way, the investigation team that insists on investigating the case despite there are many difficulties. In the process of shaping the image of the villain should be some emphasis, it can be appropriate to highlight their merits, but the facts of their crimes must be strictly combated, there can be no ambiguous representation.

4.2 Planning a complete narrative line and constructing a character arc

Character arc specifically refers to the character's nature changing for better or worse under the action of various factors, allowing the audience to see the "sublimation" of the character when its plot is reversed. Gao Qiqiang's identity changes from a fishmonger at the bottom of society to a powerful business tycoon, a complete narrative line unfolds, changing the negative image of the traditional film and television dramas, animation, literature, which always "bad to the end" or "bad first, then good" and other facial patterns, so Gao’s character image is more fleshed out. Therefore, when portraying the villain, it is necessary to depict the character through precise details; weakening the absolute dichotomy between good and evil and achieving the right blend; building character relationships, injecting touching elements such as family, love and friendship; emphasizing the use of costuming to hint at the state of the characters. Ultimately, the audience will have a correct perception of the villain's image through a complete narrative line.

4.3 Clarify the narrative meaning of the character and play an appropriate role in the script

The villainous image in the drama usually has the function of setting off the positive image and spirit. As in The Knockout, Xu Zhong asks An Xin twenty years later, "If you go back in to the past, would you still be willing to help the bullied Gao Qiqiang?" An Xin's answer is still "yes". The play uses Gao Qiqiang's evil to set off An Xin's goodness, persistence, bravery and other wonderful qualities. Creating film and television dramas should pay attention to the expression of good and evil characters when they confront each other, and deliver the correct ideological value guidance to the audience.

5 Summary and Reflection

This paper focuses on the "atypical" villain Gao Qiqiang in the film and television drama The Knockout as the object of study. Through content analysis, we explore why he has changed impression of the villain in the past and triggered a mass frenzy, but there are still some areas that can be improved.

First, the research object is single. In recent years, there are many popular crackdowns on gang crimes film and television drama portraying a series of charming villain such as The People's Name, Penalty, Crime Crackdown, The long night and so on. We can select them one by one, analyze their universality and specificity, and then answer the question "How to portray negative images in melodramatic films and TV works?" "How is the scale of the negative role grasped?" "How to use the stories of villains to guide audiences to form correct values?" and other such issues. Secondly, the research questions can be further developed by combining psychology, drama and film studies to explore the reasons why audiences love villains, as well as the effects played by script design and filming techniques. Third, the research method is yet to be liberalized. In addition to the content analysis method, questionnaires and focus group interviews can be designed to explore how the audience interprets the image of the villain from the perspective of their acceptance, and thus provide suggestions for the shaping of the antagonist.

References

[1] .Dogra Sapna.(2017).The Thirty-One Functions in Vladimir Propp’s Morphology of the Folktale: An Outline and Recent Trends in the Applicability of the Proppian Taxonomic Model. Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities(2). doi:10.21659/rupkatha.v9n2.41.

[2] .Shamus Khan.(2020).Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959). Public Culture(2 (91)). doi:10.1215/08992363-8090145.

[3] .Kermode Frank.(2009).Concerning E. M. Forster E. M. Forster and the Art and Science of the Novel. NEW ENGLAND REVIEW-MIDDLEBURY SERIES(3).

[4] .Melanie C. Green,Timothy C. Brock & Geoff F. Kaufman.(2004).Understanding Media Enjoyment: The Role of Transportation Into Narrative Worlds. Communication Theory(4). doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.2004.tb00317.x.

[5] .Li Yang.(1996).A Study of Chinese Folk Tale Forms.Shantou University Press.(in Chinese)

[6] .Wei Jianhua, Karl Heinrich Marx, & Friedrich Engels.(2009).Complete Works of Marx and Engels.People's Publishing House.(in Chinese)

[7] .Huang Ju.(2021). A Study on the Construction and Changes of Chinese Images in Western Film and TV Drama.Journal Of News Research.11(18):2.(in Chinese)

[8] .Tu Liuyu.(2021).The construction and imbalance of urban women's image in female narrative urban dramas: the example of “Nothing but Thirty”.Radio&TV Journal. 000(006):90-92.(in Chinese)

[9] .Liu Ming.(2021).A study on the portrayal of villainous characters in Pixar's animated films.Shanghai Normal University.(in Chinese)

[10] .Zhu Yakun.(2020).Analysis of the image of villains in <The Avengers> movie series.

Home Drama.(9):2.(in Chinese)

[11] .Deng Miao.(2014).From Story Morphology to Storytelling - The Meaning, Dilemma and Way Out of Propp's Storytelling Theory.Research On Folklore Texts.(2):10.(in Chinese)

[12] .Lu Puling.(2011).Inspirational implications of Propp's functional theory for the study of narrative characters.Jiangxi Social Sciences.(4):4.(in Chinese)

[13] .Zhang Chunlei.(2012).Analysis of popular spy dramas from Propp's "character-structure" perspective.Data Of Culture And Education.(10):91-92.(in Chinese)

[14] .Rong Yu,&Tang Hailong.(2018).The Narrative Features of <Empresses in the Palace> from Propp's Story Morphology Narrative Theory.Appreciation of Masterpieces: Academic Edition (second half).(2):3.(in Chinese)

[15] .Wang Yan.(2015).How Stories Affect Us:Mechanisms of Influence in Narrative Transmission.Psychology:Techniques And Applications.(in Chinese)