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FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF MOVIE CHARACTERS: THE CASE OF THE TAG-ALONG

Wei Ting Hsieh

Department of Graphic Arts and Communications, National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei, Taiwan

mimmy83530@gmail.com

Yen Jung Chang

Department of Graphic Arts and Communications, National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei, Taiwan

yenjung.chang@gmail.com

Abstract

The types of Taiwanese films are becoming more and more abundant, especially those with “thriller” or “horror” elements. In addition to the increase in these types of film production, there are more brilliant box office performances. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to conduct a more in-depth analysis of this type of films. Analyzing the role design and plot direction in the films, so that there is a narrative structure can be referenced in this type of works. This study adopted text analysis, and coupled with the character functions theory proposed by scholar Propp. This study analyzed the functionalities of the main characters in the famous domestic movie “The Tag-Along”. The research results show that there are 6 types of functional characters in “The Tag-Along”: the villain, the helper, the donor, the dispatcher, the hero and the princess. In the 31 character functions listed by Propp, the film contains 18 of them, and these 18 functions are used to describe the story. The film of thriller and horror types are

still developing in Taiwan, and the researchers expect to use this research result to find the narrative structure of this type of films. Filmmakers will have a basic structure for reference when creating such movies, and at the same time it extends the other possibilities of this type of films in the development of characters and plots.

Keywords

Functional Analysis, Movie Character, Propp, Narrative Structure, The Tag-Along

1. Introduction

In 2008, the film “Cape No. 7” set a box office of NT\$500 million, bringing the hope to the long-lost downturn environment of film and television industry. The success of “Cape No. 7” regained the confidence of filmmakers and investors, and also increases the willingness of audience to enter the theater watching films of Taiwan. The types of Taiwanese films are mostly based on campus romance and local comedy. With the increase in the production of Taiwan films, the types are gradually diversified. According to statistics from the Ministry of Culture, campus romance and local comedy genres still occupy most of the production of Taiwanese movies, and the proportion of film production in the genres of horror and thriller are gradually increasing. This part is mainly related to the type of Taiwan film production in recent years (Ministry of Culture, 2018).

The research object of this study is Taiwan's film “The Tag-Along” released in 2015. The Taiwanese box office list has long been occupied by campus romance and New Year's comedy. “The Tag-Along”, which is based on the folk legend, has a box office of NT\$90 million. The movie took the fourth place at the box office in 2015, and also won the recognition of the domestic film festival. It made film workers see the possibility of development about horror and thriller movies in Taiwan.

The story of “The Tag-Along” is derived from the V8 film broadcast in Taiwan's Spiritual Program in 1998. The film recorded the process of a family playing in the mountain. After they went home, they found a strange girl in the film. She was pale, dressing in red and she was alone at the end of the team. The little girl's eyes were always covered with a shadow, and no one remembered that there was such a little girl at the time. The audience couldn't help but feel creepy.

Thence, the researchers decided to adopt the character function theory proposed by Russian formalist Propp in his book “Morphology of Folk Tale” to analyze this film extended by folktale (Propp, V., 1928). Propp analyzed more than 100 Russian folktales and summarized the elements, components or projects in them. He opened up the scientific research methods of narrative theory (Liu, L., 2014). The “The Tag-Along” is a film work with folk stories as the main axis. Therefore, researchers expect to analyze the roles and plots in the film by Propp's theory, and adopt the theory to develop the research structure of this study.

2. Method

2.1 Research Purposes and Issues

The increase in Taiwan's horror and thriller movies has opened up another type of development for the Taiwanese film environment with a long-standing theme. The researchers expect to have a more in-depth analysis of this type of film, analyze the role arrangement and plot direction in the film, so that this type of work can be referenced in the film narrative.

Therefore, the researchers extended the following three research questions from the above research purposes:

- What are the types of characters in “The Tag-Along”?
- What are the character functions that appear in “The Tag-Along”?
- How does the character function appearing in “The Tag-Along” build up the plot?

2.2 Research Method

This study adopts text analysis. Text analysis is the application of certain theories, ideas or values to the text. Different theoretical ideas will propose different interpretation results of the text (Berger, 1995). According to this, the researchers used the character functions theory proposed by scholar Propp in his literary work “Morphology of Folk Tale” as a tool to analyze this text. Propp divides the characters in the narrative works into seven categories, and points out that their actions and existence itself are “functional”, and the plot development of the story is promoted by the "function" of these characters.

Propp divides the characters into seven categories: the villain, the donor, the helper, the princess, the dispatcher, the hero, and false hero. These characters extend 31 functions, and each function appears in a fixed episode (Lapsley& Westlake, 1988) (Myers, S., 2014). Propp's argument quantitatively analyzes the correspondence between characters and functions in the story, and also inspired subsequent scholars' comprehension of the film narrative structure.

2.3 Research Process

Based on the above, the research process developed in this study is as follows:

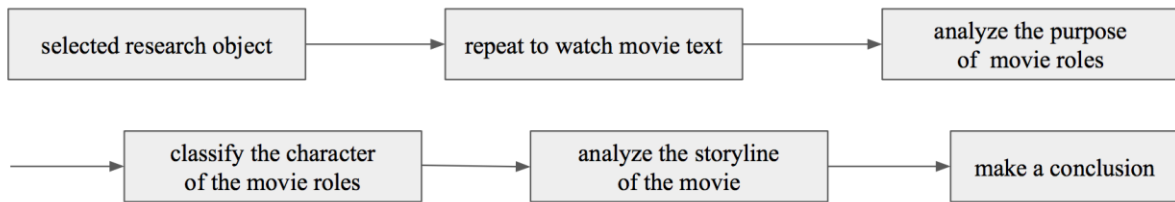


Figure 1: *Flow Chart of the Research*

After watching the movie repeatedly. First of all, the researchers recorded the individual purposes of the roles in the film. And considered it as a basis for the classification of characters. Then the researchers sorted out the functions corresponding to the theory in the plot of the film, and finally put forward the conclusions of this study.

3. Result

3.1 Analyze the Purpose of Movie Roles

After repeatedly watching the movie, the researchers first list the important people in the film, sum up the goals of each one, and briefly describe the characters. In addition, because some supporting roles have fewer shots in the film, compared with the main characters. Their actions on their own goals are not too much in the film, which makes it unable to distinguish the functions produced by them, so the researcher will not classify these characters. The list of characters in “The Tag-Along” is as follows:

Table 1: *The List of Characters*

The character’s name, and the goals of the characters	Describe the characters
Chen Yi Jun Save Zhi Wei.	Yi Jun and Zhi Wei have been together for five years, but she refused to marry. Yi Jun has the past of abortion, and it becomes a weakness in the control of the little girl in red.
Ho Zhi Wei Search for his grandma.	Zhi Wei desires to marry Yi Jun. Because of the busy work, there is no time to accompany his grandmother, and Zhi Wei’s compunction for her grandmother has become a

	weakness in the control of the little girl in red.
Ho Wen Shu Fang (Zhi Wei's grandma) Search for Zhi Wei.	Because her friend, Lin Li Shui called her name, she was captured by little girl in red. And then she was able to go home because she called the name of Zhi Wei.
Search and rescue team Help Yi Jun find Zhi Wei.	After confirming Yi Jun's determination, they went to Wanlongkeng with Yi Jun to search and rescue of Zhi Wei.
Little girl in red Grab people back to the mountains.	She is as short as a child and as agile as a fox. She will confuse people's minds, and summon the devil within the person.
Lin Li Shui (Not mentioned)	It was the first goal of the little girl in red because she was called by someone else when she climbed the mountain. Then she got home because she called Ho Wen Shu Fang's name.
Lin Huo Kun Help Zhi Wei find his grandma. Help Yi Jun fight against the little girl in red.	He is the community guard of Zhi Wei's home. When Lin Li Shui, Ho Wen Shu Fang and Zhi Wei disappeared, he was very enthusiastic to help find them out. He knows a lot of ways to deal with little girl in red. In the later period, he became mentally absentminded because he was stared at by the red girl.

3.2 Classify the Characters of those People in the Movie

Based on those people's goals and descriptions in the above table, the researchers classify the position of each character by Propp's theory. The list of character's classification for "The Tag-Along" is as follows:

Table 2: *The List of Character's Classification*

The character	Description of the character	First half of the movie	The second half of the movie
villain	He is an evil character against the hero.	Little girl in red	
donor	Provide the hero with something that can solve the task.		Search and rescue team

helper	Assist the hero in completing the task.	Lin Huo Kun	
princess	Waiting for the hero's help.	Ho Wen Shu Fang	Ho Zhi Wei
dispatcher	He is the role who causes the hero acts.	Ho Wen Shu Fang	Ho Zhi Wei
hero	Fight against the villain and solve the task.	Ho Zhi Wei	Chen Yi Jun
false hero	A bad person who pretends to be a good person, often searches or acts like a real hero.		

The film mentions that due to the overexploitation of the forests by human beings, the little girl in red living in the mountains lost her living space. Therefore, whenever a man cuts down a tree, they will grab a person up the mountain. There is a legend in Taiwan. When climbing a mountain, you can't call someone's full name. If the man responds you, he will be stared at by the ghosts in the forest. The method of catching people by the little girl in red is very simple. They first catch those who are called the full name when climbing the mountain. These people can let others replace themselves and go home smoothly if they call out the names of others.

The people who were stared at by the red girl in the film were Lin Li Shui, Ho Wen Shu Fang, Zhi Wei and Lin Huo Kun. Their disappearance also made their characters disappear and replaced by other ones. The characters in "The Tag-Along" changed with the development of the storyline. Therefore, the researchers cut the film into two parts: the front and the back. And found out who plays these characters before and after the movie.

3.3 Analyze the Storyline of the Movie

After determining the role of the movie character, the researchers filled the corresponding movie plots into the form according to the 31 role functions proposed by Propp. The character's functions for "The Tag-Along" is as follows:

1. A member of the hero's community or family leaves the security of the home environment: Grandma is missing

2. The hero is warned not to take rescue action: Zhi Wei began looking for grandma, but no one opposed him. Therefore, the researchers believe that this function does not appear.
3. The hero ignores the warning and continues to act, and the villain takes the opportunity to sneak into the hero's surroundings: The red girl has begun to appear around Zhi Wei, but he has not been warned. Therefore, the researchers believe that this function does not appear.
4. The villain begins collecting intelligence for a conspiracy.
5. The villain gets the victim's intelligence: The way the red girl catches a person is to let the person who has been arrested call out the name of another person, which is called "replacement" in Taiwan. The red girl learned that Zhi Wei's name was not detected by herself, but because her grandmother called his name. Therefore, the researchers consider that the 4th and 5th functions do not appear.
6. The villain tries to deceive the victim to get something valuable.
7. The victim makes a mistake and helps the enemy inadvertently: After her grandmother came back, she said that because she called Zhi Wei's name, Zhi Wei was arrested. The researchers reasoned that the little girl in red did deceive her grandmother and asked her to call someone out, but the process was not emerged, so the researchers saw that the 6th and 7th functions did not appear.
8. The villain hurts the person or thing beside the hero, and it poses a threat to hero: Zhi Wei is missing.
9. The hero realized that the original safe life was damaged: Although Yi Jun has always refused to marry Zhi Wei, she found that she could not lose him after Zhi Wei disappeared.
10. The hero decides to take action and find tools that will help him solve the problem: Yi Jun begins to look for Zhi Wei with various channels.
11. The hero leaves home and embarks on a journey to complete the mission: Yi Jun went to Wanlongkeng to find Zhi Wei.
12. The hero is assisted by a helper or donor, and before getting help, the hero must go through some tests to determine if the hero is worth their help: The search and rescue team asked if Yi Jun was determined to go up the mountain for search and rescue.

13. The hero responds to the help from the helper or donor: Yi Jun signed a contract for voluntary search and rescue.
14. After the hero has been tested, he gets an item that allows him to solve the task: Search and rescue team gave Yi Jun firecrackers.
15. Hero arrives at the mission location: Yi Jun arrives in Wanlongkeng.
16. Hero and villain face-to-face: Little girl in red is wrapped in Yi Jun.
17. The hero gets a mark after a confrontation with the villain, which may be an item, an injury, or the idea of another person: Yi Jun has the past of abortion, and it becomes a weakness in the control of the little girl in red. The villain made the illusion that Yi Jun thought she was pregnant and had a stomachache.
18. The hero defeats the villain: Yi Jun did not defeat the red girl, so the researchers saw that this function does not appear.
19. The damage that occurred in the front has been solved: Yi Jun embraced the children she had ever induced abortion, and said sorry to the children.
20. Hero returns home: After Yi Jun found Zhi Wei, she took Zhi Wei away and escapes from the forest.
21. The hero was chased on his way home: Yi Jun and Zhi Wei were chased by hordes of the villains.
22. The hero is saved from a chase: Yi Jun and Zhi Wei did not escape from the villain, so the researchers saw that this function did not appear.
23. The hero arrives, whether in a location along their journey or in their destination, and is unrecognized or unacknowledged: Yi Jun and Zhi Wei are still in the mountains, so the researchers believe that this function did not appear.
24. Fake heroes make unfounded claims to suppress heroes: Because the film does not have the character of a false hero, the researchers see that this function does not appear.
25. The hero faces more difficult tasks: Yi Jun was bound by the tree, and the little girl in red approached her step by step. Zhi Wei in front of her is surrounded by a group of red girls.
26. The task is solved: Yi Jun used firecrackers to attack the red girl so that she could escape. At this point, the search and rescue team projected the flares, and the villains in the mountains were afraid of the light so they disappeared. Yi Jun and Zhi Wei successfully went down the mountain.

27. The hero is given due recognition: The film did not mention what recognition Yi Jun obtained after successfully saving Zhi Wei, so the researchers saw that this function did not appear.
28. The false hero and/or villain is exposed to all and sundry: The identity of the little girl in red is still not verified, so the researchers see that this function does not appear.
29. The hero gains a new appearance: Yi Jun forgave the past she ever did, and accepted the marriage with Zhi Wei.
30. The villain gets punishment: After Yi Jun and other people left the forest, the red girl did not appear again, and we could not know whether she was punished. Therefore, the researchers believe that this function does not appear.
31. Hero gets reward: Yi Jun reunited with Zhi Wei and his grandma.

There are 18 functions appear in “The Tag-Along”. Those functions are 1st, 8th to 17th, 19th to 21st, 25th, 26th, 29th and 31st.

4. Conclusion

There are 6 characters and 18 functions in “The Tag-Along”.

The purposes of this research are classify the types of these characters, and find out the character functions appeared in the film. Through the research process, we find there are 6 characters in the movie: the villain, the donor, the helper, the princess, the dispatcher and the hero. And there are 18 functions appeared in it.

Character in the film has changed.

The researchers believe that in “The Tag-Along”, the three roles of princess, sender, and hero are not played by a fixed character from beginning to end, but are transformed during the plot. In the first half of the movie, Zhi Wei began to look for his grandma because of her disappearance. In this process, the grandmother is waiting for the rescue, so she plays the role of “princess”. And the audience can clearly realize that Zhi Wei has a task to be solved: to search his grandmother, the character played by Zhi Wei is the “hero”. The “dispatcher” that prompted Zhi Wei's action was the disappearing grandmother.

In the second half of the movie, due to the disappearance of Zhi Wei, the original “hero” character disappeared. Yi Jun began to search for Zhi Wei through various channels and became the “hero” in the second half of the story. Zhi Wei, who originally played the “hero”, became the

“princess” that Yi Jun wanted to save. It was also the “dispatcher” for Yi Jun to embark on the journey.

The range of the donor and the helper overlaps and is difficult to segment.

In the first half of the movie, Lin Huo Kun plays the character of helper. He took Yi Jun to Zhi Wei's home and did a lot of exorcism rituals. He also explained the sound of firecrackers will break the boundary line between humans and ghosts. In addition to playing the character of helper, Lin Huo Kun also conveyed a message that can solve the task, so he has a bit of relation with the donor. It is a pity that after being stared by the little girl in red, Lin Huo Kun's mind became mentally absentminded and the character of the helper disappeared.

Different from the folk stories, there are always a few partners around the hero to embark on a journey together. The hero of “The Tag-Along” was set out with the search and rescue team before going to the mission site. The search and rescue team seemed to be playing the character of “helper”, but the team got separated from Yi Jun before the confrontation between she and the villain. She was alone in the face of the villain. Fortunately, the rescue team gave Yi Jun several firecrackers before going up the mountain. They did their responsibility of being the donor.

When the villain is played by a non-figurative person, some functions cannot be distinguished.

The character of the villain in “The Tag-Along” is played by the little girl in red. Because she is in the image of a "demon", not a real person. So researchers can't see how she sneaked into the enemy camp and collected intelligence in the first half of the movie.

The researchers believe that because “The Tag-Along” is a horror and thriller movie. Therefore, in order to create a mysterious and inaccessible image of the red girl in the film. There are not too many shots of the girl in the first half of the movie, which makes it impossible to display her character function.

5. Suggestions for Future Research

The researchers find that some roles are not played by a fixed character from beginning to end, but are transformed during the plot. Researchers believe that the phenomenon of whether the roles will change frequently can be further confirmed. Researchers also expect future research to explore the flow of role functions.

Perhaps because Propp's role function theory is aimed at the analysis of traditional folktales, the roles in folktales are relatively simple and fixed. So when we adopt this theory to analyze film works with more complex narrative structures and roles, we can clearly see that the roles overlap, especially the donor and the helper. Future research can further explore these two "assist roles" and divide the donor and the helper in more detail. In addition, we also suggest that future research can further integrate the actions of "abstract villain" such as ghosts, curses, etc.

The last, the study only analyzes one film work, and the researchers suggest that future research can analyze more than one film and draw a more complete conclusion.

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